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Ancient Narratives in the Modern Museum: Interpreting Classical Archaeology in British Museums

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**The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's
own.**

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Abigail Baker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Abstract

This thesis considers how the stories preserved in Greek and Roman texts have been used in British museums from the early nineteenth century to the present. It explores the tendency to prioritise textual over visual information which is easy to overlook when dealing with object-based institutions. It demonstrates the pervasive effect that ancient texts and the narratives they convey have had on the way museums think about individual objects, wider history and their own role as public institutions.

A series of case studies offer snapshots of the relationship between object and text at different times and places: how ancient texts were used to articulate a political and public role for the Elgin marbles; how public and academic interest in myth inspired innovative museum interpretation in the work of Charles Newton, Jane Harrison, Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans; how collecting at the Fitzwilliam museum demonstrates the difficulties of escaping ancient narratives, even for those committed to object-based approaches; and how an exhibition of Greek Art in World War Two used ancient images and texts alongside each other in ways that idealised Greek art and freedom, while also revealing unease about the relationship between image and text in ancient sources. By looking at these through broader intellectual and social themes it develops a history with continuity as well as contrasts.

Several of the case studies visit completely new ground for the history of museums, but even the most familiar moments in collecting history can be understood in new ways through an awareness of how deeply our understanding of ancient objects has been shaped by ancient narratives. I build on contemporary interest in the active role of museums in constituting our understanding of the past by treating the museum as a site of textual reception and an active participant in a tradition.

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1. Introduction: narratives of the museum

In the Enlightenment gallery of the British Museum is a framed picture of some fish. If visitors look closely (which they tend not to, since it is displayed in a low wall case, just above the floor) they might see that the picture is not a painting but made of thousands of tiny stone tesserae. There is an inscription that runs around the outside of its gilt frame:

Discovered in the ruins of the palace of Pope Leo 12th at the villa Chichignola. Presented by Pope Gregory 16th to Sir Edward Thomason in the year 1832. The mosaic contains 20,000 silicious pebbles is [sic] the work of Sosus Pergami who flourished 320 years before Christ and is mentioned in the writings of the Elder Pliny¹

This gives many of the pieces of information we might expect to find on a museum label: artist, date and collecting history. These are more than neutral facts; they are designed to shape viewers' evaluation of the mosaic. Everything, from the fact it once belonged to the Papal collections to the sheer number of tesserae, is meant to impress on us the importance of this small picture of sea life. But nothing is more impressive than the mention by Pliny the Elder.

The inscription's slightly awkward grammar makes it difficult to tell whether Pliny mentions this mosaic or only Sosus. Pliny described two works by Sosus: one depicting a dove drinking and the other (called the *asaroton oecon*) designed to give the impression of an unswept floor, still strewn with debris. It is possible that the framed picture was understood as a very fishy bit of the unswept pavement but, since Sosus is the only mosaicist mentioned by Pliny, he may simply have been chosen because there were no other options.² A mention by

¹ "British Museum Collection Search, Museum number 2009,5005.1" Last accessed, January 13, 2013 http://www.britishmuseum.org/system_pages/beta_collection_introduction/beta_collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3200097&partId=1&searchText=2009%2c5005.1.

² The section on mosaics which mentions Sosus is: Plin. *HN* 36.60-64.

Pliny was widely deemed a guarantee of quality but, in this case, observed quality seems to have been enough to earn a Plinian pedigree.



Figure 1. A Roman mosaic in the Enlightenment gallery of the British Museum, framed like a painting.

The difficulties of making sense of this image in the British Museum are compounded by the fact that we are no longer meant to be impressed with the picture as the work of an unusually skilled mosaicist. In the Enlightenment gallery, the fish mosaic stands for a particular kind of connoisseurship, typical of the Enlightenment values that brought together the British Museum's collections. The reference to Pliny places the mosaic in a canon of art derived, not from extant works, but from the writings of ancient authors. Pliny's approach to art saw it as a small aspect of natural history. Mosaics were dealt with in the section on stone - hence the stress on the "20,000 silicious pebbles" in the framing description. In this sense, the mosaic reflects the multidisciplinary aspirations of the gallery. But the force of post-Enlightenment

departmental and disciplinary boundaries remains - these fish made of stone are in the *Art and Civilisation* theme, kept a safe distance from the natural history specimens that represent *The Natural World*.

Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century is a refurbishment of the King's Library of the British Museum, completed in 2004. It is a space that aims to show the ideas that structured the museum in the eighteenth century and to evoke historical forms of display without being particularly concerned with reconstructing any actual past layout of the room.³ The fish mosaic's place in the *Art and Civilisation* section makes it emblematic of the relationships and values that led to this mosaic being taken from its ancient context and framed like a painting. In this, the inscription is as important as (if not more so than) the image itself. The frame around the mosaic has transformed its meaning from a piece of interior decor to a masterpiece. But the way this is presented in the Enlightenment gallery transforms it once again into a piece of art history. The museum is a framing device that shapes how we see the objects in it and in turn has an effect on our ideas about the past.⁴

Despite standing for an aspect of the British Museum in the Enlightenment, the mosaic was not owned by the museum until 2009.⁵ It is there, not as an artefact of that history, but because of the stories it can evoke of collecting, travel and the desire to connect with the things mentioned by ancient authors. The interest in its own history that the British Museum displays in the Enlightenment gallery is part of a much wider self-reflexive impulse in museum displays in which museums explore their own histories as well as those of their collections.

³ Beth Lord, "Representing Enlightenment Space," in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, ed. Suzanne Macleod (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 146–157.

⁴ Donald Preziosi "Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity," in *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. Paul Duro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96–110.

⁵ "British Museum Collection Search, Museum number 2009,5005.1"

This is the result of a boom in the study of museums over the past couple of decades that has undermined the idea that the museum is a neutral background for its contents. An ancient artefact can be presented as evidence in a timeline, an aesthetic icon, a symbolic evocation of a lost past or within an immersive reconstruction. Each of these approaches gives a particular impression of the object, its place in the past and the role of archaeology, and closes off other possibilities for interpretation.⁶

Deepening analysis has shown that museum interpretation is seldom just about the past and has increased awareness of the inequalities that museums present and perpetuate.⁷ The antique display cases and apparently old-fashioned arrangement of the Enlightenment gallery are, paradoxically, the product of some very contemporary anxieties. In a context which sees museums as a cultural practice in their own right, their history and approaches need explaining. Introductory galleries that tell collection histories offer a way to provide visitors with necessary background information and acknowledge that museums are no longer seen as self-explanatory cultural practice. The British Museum's role in working out the knowledge systems of the Enlightenment, and its continuing ability to represent these developments is an important part of its history in its own right, but is also used to argue for the collection's importance and against restitution claims.⁸ Exploring the collection as a product of a particularly important time, place and intellectual climate presents it as greater than the sum of its parts. The museum's Enlightenment display needed to balance celebrating the museum's roots and justifying it in the present with

⁶ Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Re-constructing Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 68-99.

⁷ Caroline Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 54-55; Richard Sandell ed. *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ Mark O'Neill, "Enlightenment Museums: Universal or Merely Global?" *Museum and Society* 2, 3 (2004): 190-202.

the growing awareness that the expansion of intellectual horizons in the Enlightenment is inextricably linked with imperialism.⁹

The fish mosaic example raises a lot of themes that will recur in this chapter and the thesis as a whole: the influence of Pliny, competing value systems, the Enlightenment, the interest in museum histories both in scholarship and on display in public galleries and the question of whether ancient objects should be thought of as “art” in our terms. The mosaic is also a classic example of what we expect ancient texts to do in a museum - if we see them at all. The mosaic is literally framed by a very art-historical narrative, focused on dates, creator, owners, facts, figures and a mention in the literature. In this study, I want to look at how not only texts, but also the narratives behind them operate in the museum environment. I will build on contemporary interest in the active role of museums in constituting our understanding of the past by treating the museum as a site of textual reception and an active participant in a tradition.

There is a broad variety of textual sources from the ancient world that can be made relevant to objects in museums: relating to artists, collectors, the subjects represented by figurative art, historical developments in which objects played a role, the mode of material consumption, the objects’ original context and so on. Given how much there was to choose from, I want to look at what was selected and how it was used. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on ancient narratives, rather than ancient texts, since the narrative contents of the text are often picked up on and re-told in the museum independently of the text itself.

Narrative has emerged in recent years as an important theme for understanding the past and improving the way it is presented. Post-processual approaches in archaeology have adopted narrative form to reflect the importance subjective interpretation at every stage of archaeological investigation and combat the

⁹ Kim Sloan, ed. *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 13.

myth of objective readings of the archaeological record.¹⁰ Narrative has also been adopted as a major theme in the study of museums. It appears in critiques of museum displays that present history as a monolithic linear process that supports the dominant ideology, and in attempts to propose better approaches. Narratives in museums today are seen as a way to cross disciplinary boundaries, reflect something fundamental about the way humans experience the world and present many possible readings of objects, while still producing coherent interpretation.¹¹ In practice, narrative can be an extremely difficult term to pin down, ranging from being simply synonymous with story (including both fact and fiction), through to the ideologically-loaded grand narratives that constitute official histories and identities. In this thesis, I have used a deliberately loose definition of ancient narrative, spanning notions of political identity, literary tradition, myth and storytelling to reflect the diverse possibilities. This will offer greater historical depth to current discourse on narrative in museums.

Some of the examples which I will explore, such as recurring uses of Pliny's "art history" (this chapter) and the various nationalistic appropriations (chapters two and five), fit well with standard accounts of museum histories. But I also want to explore some of the more awkward territory uncovered by acknowledging that museums cannot make sense of the past by their collections alone. We will see museums searching for truth in myth (and debating what kind of truths can be found there), grappling with previous generations' very personal approaches to the ancient world and exploring the difficult relationship between image and text in ancient sources. These sorts of engagement with ancient texts are often treated as somewhat peripheral to the

¹⁰ Gill Andrews and John C. Barrett, "Interpretation Not Record: The Practice of Archaeology" *Antiquity* 74, 285 (2000): 525.

¹¹ Suzanne Macleod et. al. ed. *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

museum's core functions of understanding objects, but I want to show how they have shaped not only the understanding and display of ancient objects but also the idea of the museum itself.

Museums were an important site for working out disciplinary boundaries and continue to reflect and constitute disciplinary knowledge through their displays. As a result, museum histories are often disciplinary histories, with an interest in how configurations of disciplinary knowledge were formed, or, following Foucault, interested in the relationship between systems of knowledge and systems of power.¹² It is important to note that while the title of this thesis foregrounds archaeology (since some of its objects are far from being art) the objects it discusses are highly unrepresentative of the priorities of archaeology as currently understood. They are largely the showy, impressive pieces that look good in museums, without the sort of clearly documented provenance that would make them fully meaningful to archaeologists.¹³

This thesis is an engagement with some of the other factors that have made the past significant. Its subject matter is necessarily interdisciplinary. It draws on recent work in the histories of museums, archaeology, classics and art. The nature of museums means that most histories of museums are at least somewhat interdisciplinary, but they usually concentrate on object-focused disciplines, meaning that the literary texts that have traditionally been central to the study of the classical world are sidelined when Greek and Roman material in museums is discussed. Greece and Rome dominated the education system for centuries and literature was favoured as the means to study these societies.¹⁴

¹² Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archaeology in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Duckworth, 2009); Eileann Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹³ Christopher Chippindale et al., "Collecting the Classical World: First Steps in a Quantitative History," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 10, 01 (March 9, 2005): 1–31.

¹⁴ Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

The centrality of Greek and Roman texts to the study of the ancient world reflects a much broader logocentrism in our society, which can be traced back to suspicion of images in the Reformation. This has had a lasting effect on the way the two categories are discussed: images are seen as sensory experience, words as intellectual.¹⁵ The emphasis on text over image as a means of reasoned debate has shaped academic disciplines as we understand them today and supposedly image / object focused disciplines are no exception - after all, this is a written thesis. In this thesis, I will explore the growing importance of material culture for understanding Ancient Greece and Rome in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and ask whether this development could have occurred without the literary tradition, even in the most object-focused institutions.

Because of its interest in the modern responses to ancient art and texts, this thesis fits into the discipline of classical reception studies. But my engagement with reception studies is more than just a question of subject matter. I also want to draw on some of the deeper insights of classical reception: that our understanding of ancient art and texts is inevitably shaped by our context and experiences, including prior responses to the images and texts in question. As Martindale puts it: "...our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected."¹⁶ This model and its sources of influence in the German hermeneutical tradition are easily adapted to the study of ancient art.¹⁷ Reception studies shows how our responses have come into being and allows us to reflect on some of the other possibilities that have been lost. I believe this is particularly important for

¹⁵ Michael Squire, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15-87.

¹⁶ Charles Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-35.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 96-103.

museums, which give an impression of permanence that effaces the changing attitudes and displays that have gone into it.

The museum can also be a difficult place to explore reception as it can often lack the clarity of a single writer expressing their thoughts about an ancient text. Instead, the museum presents its own version of the past (often seemingly neutral and factual), which is received in turn by a diverse public. Museums (and some museologists) tend to imagine an ideal visitor in a transmission model of communication, but this simplistic approach is gradually giving way to a more active model in which visitors make their own meaning.¹⁸ The result is an extremely diverse range of possibilities, complicated by the problems of ephemerality that tend to haunt museum histories - often the visitor responses are even less well recorded than the displays themselves, and the ones that do survive are of comparatively privileged visitors, closer to the ideal imagined by the museum. While it is impossible to explore all responses (and not all responses are equally important) this thesis shows that the museum has always been seen as a site for debate (chapter 2), a place experienced differently by different groups (chapter 3), and a site that must go beyond its standard knowledge systems when acquiring objects (chapter 4) or serving external aims (chapter 5).

A reception approach that recognises the reciprocity between the past and our responses to it is particularly important in this thesis, which looks at a contemporary phenomenon in past contexts. It allows me to explore the theme of narrative, without implying that it has always been such an important concern. We will encounter narrative as something explored and championed, but also as something suppressed. Whichever is the case, looking at narrative shows us something important about how museums and their public

¹⁸ Eileann Hooper-Greenhill ed., *The Educational Role of the Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), 15-19, 28-43.

understood the past and what possibilities this left open for future responses. As a result, this thesis will explore the variety of ways that stories can work in museums, and ask what the use of narrative in museums looks like outside the postmodern, new museological context which it suits so well.

This first chapter will explore some of the fundamental narratives that recur in museum histories themselves. It starts with the idea that museums originate with ancient temples and shows that this notion is much more than a simple explanation of origins. It asks how the ancient temple is used to debate whether ancient “art” is really art in our terms and to explore the nature of the museum itself. The next section examines some of the other ancient narratives that have operated in the formation of collections of ancient art - including Pliny’s “art history” discussed above. Then we will consider the idea of museums coming from a revolutionary break with the past (whether in political or intellectual revolution) and how such breaks often look back to classical exempla and justify themselves through grand narratives of progress. We will end with a brief exploration of current trends in museology, looking in particular at how museums respond to their histories and their ambivalence to narrative which rejects traditional narratives of progress while stressing the ability of stories to empower visitors and transform museums. Exploring these tropes in writing on museums serves as a literature review, while beginning to explore the desire to connect museums to ancient literary sources and broader notions of an ancient past.

The museum as temple

It is common for histories to begin by defining their terms and searching for points of origins, and museum histories are no exception. Often these two needs can be fulfilled (at least to some extent) by discussing the meaning and origins of the word “museum.” The way a historian negotiates this etymology establishes their version of the museum and its relationship with the ancient world:

“Museum” meaning “seat of the muses,” is a classical name for a modern invention. The archaic nature of the term is, of course, part of its charm. The effect to which the institution so often seems to aspire is to give the impression of permanence, of being always already necessary and therefore established.¹⁹

The ancient Greek word “mouseion” is a name for a site of worship, that came to encompass the systematic collection of knowledge. The Mouseion at Alexandria certainly seems to have accommodated scholarly activity, but there is no reliable evidence that it held the sort of collections we would associate with a museum.²⁰ However, the Mouseion is not the only ancient temple seen as a museum. The fact that temples were (somewhat) public spaces, holding large collections of significant objects, gives them some striking similarities to the modern museum. As a result, they are often used to demonstrate an awareness that collecting and public display of objects is not a cultural phenomenon limited to the modern public museum and to test the boundaries of that category of institution.

¹⁹ J. Siegel, “Introduction,” in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

²⁰ Jeffrey Abt, “The Origins of the Public Museum,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 115-133.

Writing in the 1960s, Bazin (chief curator of paintings at the Louvre) quoted from Herodas 4 as the starting point for his history of museums. The mime describes two women visiting the temple of Asclepius on Kos and is often used to reflect on ancient attitudes to art.²¹ For Bazin, it offered a vignette of ancient life in which the mixture of casual chatter and expressions of wonder seem somewhat timeless: "One could hear analogous conversations today while following visitors through the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum..."²² This parallel is charming, but it also has more serious implications in Bazin's museum history. Bazin was keen to show ancient temple collections as open to the public, carefully inventoried and subject to conservation measures to conserve their objects for posterity - just like modern museums. The result is a sense of universality in which the relationships between art, ideas and display that are current in the modern museum have existed in other cultures.

Another museum leader (this time of the Smithsonian) who traced his history of museums to the ancient temple was Ripley.²³ His 1969 book, *The Sacred Grove*, is an extended typology of museums in which all museums can be traced to two ancient models - Greek scientific temple collecting and Roman triumphal collecting. This let him identify the modern educational science museum with Greek sophistication and see modern art galleries as a continuation of the decadent cupidity of the Romans. There is little engagement with ancient sources or the complexities of the ancient context because this history of museums is really more concerned with establishing categories for his discussion of the modern context. Teleology is a risk for anyone writing about past phenomena with implications for the present and is particularly common

²¹ e.g. Verity Platt, "Art History in the Temple," *Arethusa* 43, 2 (June 2010): 197–213.

²² Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age* (New York: Universe Books, 1967), 12.

²³ "S. Dillon Ripley, 1913-2001," accessed March 15, 2013 <http://siarchives.si.edu/history/s-dillon-ripley>.

in museum histories, since the question of whether or not a past phenomenon counts as a museum is largely defined by the nature of museums as they exist today.²⁴

In both of these histories, the idea of the ancient museum works as an origin myth which matters more as allegory than as fact, but implies at least a grain of truth. This gives Siegel's "impression of permanence" not only to the museum itself, but also to the specific model of the museum discussed by the author: for Bazin, the museum as culmination of the western tradition and site of idle curiosity, for Ripley, two opposing traditions of reverence and empiricism. However, the modern museum (and the extent to which it has roots or parallels in the ancient world) is an inevitable factor in studies of ancient collecting practices. Museums are part of the way we think about material culture and so cannot be factored out of our ideas about similar collecting contexts. It is not necessarily anachronistic to use museology and collecting theory as a theoretical toolkit of for thinking about ancient collecting as a phenomenon in its own right. So, for example, comparing ancient Rome to a museum can help us to explore the baffling range of objects that were displayed there in more familiar terms and to look deeper at their role in forming and expressing identity, memory and values.²⁵

Ancient temples were an important context for art in the ancient world and, as we have seen, have offered a useful analogy for thinking about modern museums. As a result, there have been a number of attempts to analyse temples in terms of museums. For example, the temple of Hera at Olympia has been seen as an ancient museum, based on the number and range of objects seen

²⁴ Eileann Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 1-9.

²⁵ Steven Rutledge, *Ancient Rome as a Museum: Power, Identity, and the Culture of Collecting* (Oxford, OUP: 2012), 1-29.

there by Pausanias.²⁶ Such approaches are easy to dismiss as simplistic - the cult functions at the heart of the temple are alien to our modern conception of the museum.²⁷ But, Shaya has made a case for the usefulness of contemporary museological thought to ask how far such analogies go, considering whether temples were just places to store important items or whether those items also had an active role in demonstrating and perpetuating a particular world view.²⁸

Claims that the ancients had their own museums have implications for the status of museums today. The idea of museums having existed in the ancient world makes it easier to think of ancient objects as being at home in modern museums. The question of whether the ancients had art, in our sense of the word, is a crucial one for considering whether temples could have functioned like museums. This is the subject of ongoing debate and it is beyond the scope of this literature review to go into this problem in detail. However, one of the important lessons of this debate is that “the ancients” covers multiple cultures over a period of centuries and there is not a single approach to what we would call art throughout. There seems to have been a broad shift from earlier approaches in which images were seen as embodiments of the gods to later ones in which such images could be collected and admired as art.²⁹ But it is important to note that the pressure to identify modern categories such as

²⁶ Dorothy Kent Hill, “Hera, the Sphinx?” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 13, 4 (1944): 353–360; K.W. Arafat, “Pausanias and the Temple of Hera at Olympia” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 90 (1995): 461–473.

²⁷ R. Krumeich, “Vom Haus Der Gottheit Zum Museum?: Zu Ausstattung und Funktion des Heraion von Olympia und des Athenatempels von Lindos,” *Antike Kunst* 51 (2008): 73–95.

²⁸ Josephine Shaya, “The Greek Temple as Museum: The Case of the Legendary Treasure of Athena from Lindos,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 109, 3 (2005): 423–442.

²⁹ Jeremy Tanner, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece: Religion, Society and Artistic Rationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48, 302.

museums or art can efface the cultural complexity of a world in which an image could be both admired and worshipped.³⁰

The similarities between ancient temples and modern museums are not the result of a direct and continuous descent, but were built into the earliest museums as a result of self-conscious emulation.³¹ While museums may not have direct ancient roots, their inseparability from classical reception, whether in their name, their architecture or the collections they hold, makes the temple too rich an analogy to fully abandon. The strength of museums' identification with ancient temples means that they can stand for traditional museums in arguments that seek to problematise these traditions. For example, Levin uses a duality of temple and showroom to analyse different styles of museum architecture. As we might expect, temple museums in this model often look like classical temples. They are also defined by their tendency to withdraw their contents from everyday life and make them seem sacred.³² A similar dichotomy between sacred and mercantile can be seen in Cameron's contrast between the temple and forum as opposing functions combined and balanced by modern museums. The forum is meant more in the modern sense of a space for discussion, rather than the ancient sense of marketplace, but the temple still represents traditional values and removal from the everyday.³³ This sense of a space removed from everyday experience, which is able to represent aspects of

³⁰ Platt, "Art History in the Temple."

³¹ Paula Findlen, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy," *Journal of the History of Collections* 1, 1 (1989): 59.

³² Michael D. Levin, "The Social Aspect of the Modern Museum 'Temple' or 'Showroom'" In *The Modern Museum: Temple or Showroom*, (Jerusalem: Dvir Publishing House Ltd, 1983), 33–59.

³³ Duncan F. Cameron, "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum." *Curator: The Museum Journal* 14, 1 (1971): 11–24.

that experience owes much to Foucault's theory of Heterotopias, which also groups museums with sacred spaces.³⁴

Such references to ancient temples do not see them as an early stage in the history of museums, although this is sometimes implied by dismissive use of the word temple to imply that museums are old-fashioned. Those who argue that the modern museum is a form of temple usually show little interest in demonstrating firm similarities between museums and religion. Instead, the temple serves as an archetype for the modern museum. When Hooper-Greenhill says: "Museums today are no longer built in the image of that nationalistic temple of culture, the British Museum" she refers both to the architectural style and to the reverence expected of visitors.³⁵ Often equating the museum to a temple is just a useful shorthand for a set of rather dated values, but it is also taken up more literally in some influential thought on museums. Duncan is most explicit on the subject:

Museums belong to the same architectural and art-historical category as temples, churches, shrines and certain types of palaces. This comparison is not simply a convenient metaphor: museums share fundamental characteristics with traditional ceremonial monuments.

The Museum's primary function is ideological. It is meant to impress upon those who use or pass through it society's most revered beliefs and values.³⁶

³⁴ Michel Foucault, "Texts / Contexts of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miscoe in *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* ed. Donald Preziosi and Clare Farago (London: Ashgate, 2004), 371-379.

³⁵ Eileann Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 1.

³⁶ Carol Duncan, and Alan Wallach. "The Universal Survey Museum." *Art History* 3, December (1980): 448-469.

Duncan stresses that, like temples in the past, museums are lavished with time and money, represent elite values and enforce ritual behaviours. Bourdieu makes a similar point about museums in the conclusion to *The Love of Art*:

If the love of art is the clear mark of the chosen, separating, by an invisible and insuperable barrier, those who are touched by it from those who have not received this grace, it is understandable that in the tiniest details of their morphology and their organization, museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion. In these sacred places of art such as ancient palaces or large historic residences, to which the nineteenth century added imposing edifices, often in the Graeco-Roman style of civic sanctuaries, where bourgeois society deposits relics inherited from a past which is not its own, everything leads to the conclusion that the world of art opposes itself to everyday life just as the sacred does to the profane: the untouchability of the objects, the religious silence which imposes itself on the visitors the puritan asceticism of the amenities, always sparse and rather uncomfortable, the quasi-systematic absence of any information, the grandiose solemnity of decor and decorum, colonnades, huge galleries, painted ceilings, monumental stairways, all seem to serve as reminders that the transition from the profane to the sacred world implies, as Durkheim says, 'a veritable metamorphosis', a radical transformation of the mind...³⁷

For both Duncan and Bourdieu, museums occupy the same social role as temples. Unlike many assimilations of the two, this does not imply the universality of the form, but a very particular set of power relations which can and should be challenged. Comparisons with the ancient temple are powerful

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*, trans. C. Beattie and N. Merriman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 112.

because the religious role of the temple seems to oppose the museum's claim to embody objective, rational, secular values. This offers a way to depict aesthetic approaches in museums as irrational (or at least heavily mystified) and elitist. Where the standard narrative is that museums are part of a movement that replaced religion with something more democratic and rational, this model reframes the museum as replacing religion with more of the same. While this offers a powerful way to challenge museums' claim to be secular institutions, another approach (often introduced in response to such critiques) is to attempt to make museums into a space where objects can keep their sacred functions and people can have religious experiences.³⁸

While it looks like a simple narrative, the idea that museum histories start with ancient temples does more than offer a story of how museums got here. It offers a way to reflect on the strong influence of classical antiquity on museums and potent material to define one's own relationship with that past - whether through emulation or rejection. This example shows how easy it is for an ancient model to stand for very different things in different contexts. To create an analogy with ancient temples, historians of museums must first constitute a version of ancient temples, whether chatty and informal, scholarly and secular or reverent and coercive. The ancient temple works so well as an analogy because it is malleable, with enough scope for difference from what the museum is or should be to generate a fruitful debate.

A museum's relationship with (the idea of) ancient temples helps it to negotiate what sort of a museum it is, including everything from what it looks like to how it expects its visitors to behave. It is a way of asking ourselves what sort of cultural practice museums are and how we should feel about them. It has been used to normalise them as something that (civilised) humans do (see chapter 5)

³⁸ Ivan Gaskell, "Sacred to Profane and Back Again," in *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 149–162.

but it can also use the full weight of the weirdness of ancient religion to make us think deeper about what a museum might look like to outsiders. This is not the only example of the classical past being imagined as a stable, traditional state against which to rebel.³⁹ Like many of the ancient narratives that will be discussed in this thesis, it is a way of working out modern preoccupations and negotiating a relationship between past and present. As such, it demonstrates how deeply ancient narratives are implicated in the way we think about museums.

³⁹ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 102.

Ancient models for modern collecting

While ancient temples provide an important reference point for making sense of museums, it is much easier to trace modern museums to private collecting.

Whether they began with a single private collection (e.g. the British Museum, derived from the collection of Hans Sloane) or drew together objects from many sources (e.g. the V&A), most museums owe something to these traditions. There is not sufficient scope here to summarise the entire literature on the collecting of classical art, but I want to give a sense of the ideas and preoccupations developed by private collectors that were picked up in museums and to explore the role of ancient texts in private collections.

While the term “museum” has ancient roots, its modern use to describe a site for collecting and display can be traced to Renaissance accounts of private intellectual activity. It was not just a convenient term plucked from the pages of ancient authors. It reflected a much broader emulation of classical culture through collecting and other responses to the arts.⁴⁰ As a result, the temple was not the only ancient model that collectors could look to and they proved particularly interested in ancient forerunners of their own activities, such as buying art, judging its quality, or arranging it. The sense that ancient texts could serve as guides to ancient remains is so strong that there has been a tendency view certain texts (especially Pliny’s chapters on art and Pausanias’ descriptions of his travels) as reference material, rather than works of literature in their own right.⁴¹

For much of the history of classical collecting, the interest in ancient objects has been difficult to separate from the interest in ancient texts. The strong interest in both ancient art and texts during the Renaissance is responsible for many of the

⁴⁰ Findlen, “The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy,” 59.

⁴¹ Katherine Harloe, “Pausanias as Historian in Winckelmann’s History” *Classical Receptions Journal* 2, 2 (2010): 174–196; Sorcha Carey, *Pliny’s Catalogue of Culture: Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

most influential collections of ancient material, especially in Rome. The Laocoon is an iconic example of a statue that brought together the interest in reading ancient texts, contemporary artistic production and the hunger for tangible remnants of a classical past. It was quickly identified as “the Laocoon which Pliny mentions” and its discovery, acquisition, display and reception are well-documented.⁴² The rebirth of such statues from the ground seems to enact the concept of Renaissance, but it is important to remember that this is just one among many discoveries, rediscoveries and re-evaluations.⁴³ While such sculptures were in private hands, it is clear that much more was at stake than personal whim. A range of factors determined what was desirable and who had access to it, including power, aesthetic taste, market forces, religion and historical understanding.⁴⁴

Ancient texts were a major factor in making sense of the past and establishing the value of the objects. One of the most important was Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History*. This is an encyclopaedic work, which has been mined as a source on ancient art for centuries, whether in a search for the precise art works mentioned, as a source of chronology or for information about how Romans understood and collected art.⁴⁵ Books 34 to 36 of Pliny’s *Natural History* can be read as an ancient history of art, organised by materials. Pliny used his account of art history to consider different systems of value and explore the

⁴² Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classical Art from Greece to Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 65-68; Susanne Muth “Laokoon,” in *Meisterwerke der Antiken Kunst* ed. Luca Giuliani (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), 73-93.

⁴³ See for example Richard Brilliant, *My Laocoön: Alternative Claims in the Interpretation of Artworks* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁴⁵ Carey, *Pliny’s Catalogue of Culture*, 6; J. Tanner, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece*, 3.

relationships between art, nature and power.⁴⁶ It was part of a synthesising project that aimed to present and classify the whole of nature, in which art was presented as a part of that whole - a use of natural materials and a demonstration of Roman power and luxury.⁴⁷

The broad reach of Pliny's *Natural History* and its desire to represent the world made it a perfect fit for early private collections which also aimed to compile and store complete knowledge of the world. These collections represented a fascination with counting and categorising facts and were part of a broader intellectual project that included both objects and texts and depended on the dialogue between the two.⁴⁸ Their physical structure also owed much to Pliny, since they often followed his categorisation by material and usually embedded power structures as part of their natural order.⁴⁹ There has been something of a revolution in the understanding of early collecting in recent years. Cabinets of curiosities, *Kunstkammern* and *Wunderkammern* had been seen as disorganised and personal because they do not follow categories recognisable today, such as the distinction between natural and man made objects. Yet deeper research into their value systems shows them to be organised with a strong sense of internal logic.⁵⁰

While these collections often seem idiosyncratic by modern standards, they were also the context for antiquarian work that laid down today's categories,

⁴⁶ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale, 1999), 70.

⁴⁷ Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture*.

⁴⁸ Findlen, "The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy."

⁴⁹ Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine* (Princeton: M. Wiener Publishers, 1995), 28-37; Carey, *Pliny's catalogue of culture*, 75.

⁵⁰ O. Impey and A. MacGregor. *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in 16th and 17th Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1-4.

including the beginnings of art history.⁵¹ Winckelmann (who worked both with Cardinal Albani's collection and the Papal collection) is often seen as the originator of our models for understanding ancient art, and of art history itself.⁵² It is important to note that his work was not unprecedented and shows influence from other writers on art and society, such as Vasari and Vico.⁵³ His approach was deeply rooted in the study of ancient literature and he saw emending ancient authors as one of the best things that the study of ancient art could achieve.⁵⁴ His recommended method for studying an ancient object was to familiarise oneself with it first hand, then read the entirety of ancient literature for information that could help understand it.⁵⁵ Under this system, all information from the ancient world was potentially useful, which is reflected in the wide variety of ancient texts he used to make sense of art in his own writings.

One of Winckelmann's longest lasting contributions to the study of ancient art was his periodisation of styles, which is still largely in use. Winckelmann did not have access to enough material evidence to establish this chronology (particularly its early phases) and instead drew on ancient authors' comments on early Greek art and stylistic development.⁵⁶ The idea of a progression in visual art from rough and simple to refined and realistic (and often beyond it to overblown and decadent) was a recurring trope in ancient discourse about art.

⁵¹ Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*.

⁵² Tanner, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece*, 3; A.D. Potts, "Political Attitudes and the Rise of Historicism in Art Theory," *Art History* 1 (1978): 200–204.

⁵³ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum, 1800-1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 22.

⁵⁴ A.A. Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 18.

⁵⁶ Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*, 56-59.

It had been used to explore rhetoric by Cicero and Quintilian; to speculate about a lost past by Vitruvius and Pausanias; and to explore social and political change by Pliny.⁵⁷ These gave Winckelmann the scope to fit extant works of ancient art into a narrative of stylistic refinement and decline.⁵⁸ It is through this that his greatest influence on museums becomes clear: many adopted his narrative of progress and decline and sometimes, as at the *Musée des Monuments Français*, he was explicitly honoured.⁵⁹ We will explore the adoption of chronological display in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

So far, my discussion of private collecting has mostly dealt with collections in Italy. Few of the most important Roman antiquities left Italy because popes and other powerful figures tended to get first refusal of the most important discoveries.⁶⁰ As a result, Italy had the richest collections of ancient sculpture and their influence was felt far beyond Italy. They were an important focus of the Grand Tour, from the early eighteenth century until access was made difficult by the Napoleonic wars.⁶¹ The experience of travellers coming to Italy for the first time was greatly influenced by their reading of ancient authors,

⁵⁷ Ernst Hans Gombrich, "The Debate on Primitivism in Ancient Rhetoric," *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 24–38; Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*, 58; Barkan, *Unearthing the Past*, 66–70.

⁵⁸ Alex Potts, Introduction to *History of the Art of Antiquity* by J.J. Winckelmann, ed. Potts, trans. Mallgrave (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 27–8; A.A. Donohue, "Winckelmann's History of Art and Polykleitos," in *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros and Tradition* ed. Warren G. Moon (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 327–353.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 56–74; Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 180.

⁶⁰ Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 62–73.

⁶¹ J. Scott, *The Pleasures of Antiquity: British Collectors of Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale, 2003); Stephen L. Dyson, *In Pursuit of Ancient Pasts: A History of Classical Archaeology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (New Haven and London: Yale, 2006), 5.

who were often used as guide books.⁶² The combination of knowledge of ancient texts and experience of travel was deployed to demonstrate erudition, but could also be brought together in extremely personal ways, as we will see in chapter 4.

While opportunities for Grand Tourists and other travellers to collect were limited to second rate material, collecting ancient objects (especially statuary) was seen as an important part of the experience. As a result, there was a thriving antiquities market.⁶³ While Grand Tour collections were minor in comparison with the great Papal collections, many were highly admired in their own terms, such as the Townley collection - one of the British Museum's most important early acquisitions.⁶⁴ Before becoming public property, Townley's collection decorated his house in ways that evoked a Roman villa and picked up on specific Roman practices recorded in ancient texts, such as the display of busts in the library. While ancient texts must always have been present in erudite responses to this collection, this was part of a complex cultural chain which most closely emulated Renaissance models of collecting.⁶⁵

Ancient texts were also important in articulating the value of private collections, although not always in terms the ancients would have recognised. For example, William Hamilton (while serving as British Ambassador in Naples) was able to amass a large collection of Greek vases, since these were not

⁶² Lucy Pollard, "'Every Stone Tells a Story': The Uses of Classical Texts by Seventeenth-century English Visitors to Greece and Asia Minor" *Classical Receptions Journal* 4, 1 (2012): 48–65.

⁶³ Haskell, and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 62–73.

⁶⁴ D.M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (British Museum Press, 2002), 65–68.

⁶⁵ Vicky Coltman, "Representation, Replication and Collecting in Charles Townley's Late Eighteenth-Century Library," *Art History* 29, 2 (April 2006): 304–324.

seen as particularly desirable - at least when he started collecting.⁶⁶

D'Hancarville's catalogue of this collection used selective readings of the ancient sources to make it seem that pottery was highly valued in the ancient world and avidly collected by Romans. This was an important factor in the British Museum's decision to purchase it and contributed to a wider shift in taste that continues to shape how vases are valued, collected and understood.⁶⁷

While many private collectors modelled themselves on descriptions of Roman art collecting in authors such as Pliny and Cicero, not all ancient collecting was seen in a positive light. Cicero's *Verrine Orations* were an important stimulus for thinking about the morality of collecting. Verres' thefts of art formed an important part of Cicero's attack on the corrupt governor. Because of the importance of ancient precedent and particular admiration for Cicero, these provided a focus for modern debates on the ownership of art and the personal greed of the collector.⁶⁸ Quatremère de Quincy's use of Cicero's *Verrines* in his *Letters to Miranda on the Displacement of Italian Artistic Monuments* proved particularly influential because he argued that works of art had universal importance, and should be respected and maintained in their original context.⁶⁹ In practice, public museums remained comfortable with art that had been recently taken from its source countries (whether through war, diplomacy or private initiative) for much of their early history, as we will see in the next chapter. But museums did need to find new ways to justify their collecting over

⁶⁶ Lucilla Burn, "Sir William Hamilton and the Greekness of Greek Vases," *Journal of the History of Collections* 9, 2 (1997): 241-252; Ian Jenkins, "'Contemporary Minds' Sir William Hamilton's Affair with Antiquity" in *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his Collection* ed. Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 40-62.

⁶⁷ Michael Vickers, "Value and Simplicity: Eighteenth-Century Taste and the Study of Greek Vases," *Past and Present* 116, 1 (1987): 98-137.

⁶⁸ Margaret M. Miles, *Art as Plunder: The Ancient Origins of the Debate About Cultural Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 285-348.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14-17.

private ownership, and these justifications became an important part of their identity as institutions.

Inheritance, revolution and evolution

While many museums see their histories as a smooth progression from private collecting to public display, there is an alternative narrative that sees museums as the product of a revolutionary break with this past. Either literally born out of revolution, or simply shaped by sudden political, epistemological, disciplinary or artistic changes. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw dramatic changes in museums that shaped the institutions as we know them today. However, like many other revolutionary changes, they often modelled themselves on or justified themselves with reference to classical roots.⁷⁰

The museum with the most literal roots in revolution is the Louvre. It was opened in 1793 exactly one year after the French revolution, as a celebration of its achievements.⁷¹ It was not the first public display of the French royal collections - it was based on the pre-revolutionary Luxembourg gallery project, and a failed attempt at a larger scale version in the Louvre itself.⁷² Nor was it the earliest institution with a claim to being a public museum (an honour that can be tricky to define, but is often given to the Ashmolean), but it was the first for which public status was so central to its importance.⁷³ The revolution certainly shaped the sort of museum it became, with its emphasis on the visitor's relationship with the state. This manifested itself in full public access, with none of the worries about the conduct of the working class that were expressed in the London museums.⁷⁴ This was a self-conscious contrast with the

⁷⁰ Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011), 17.

⁷¹ Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 94-95.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 13-90

⁷³ On the Ashmolean as the first public museum, see Findlen, "The Museum: its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy," 59-78; R.F. Owenell, *The Ashmolean Museum 1683-1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 28-30.

⁷⁴ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 70-71.

hoarding of treasures by the rich, and access to culture was seen as an end in itself, but also a means of instilling values and forming a post-revolutionary identity.

Although classical antiquity had been an important part of the trappings of power before the revolution, the Louvre was one way to adapt it to post-revolutionary needs.⁷⁵ Hopes were expressed that the museum would make Paris into a new Athens, envisioning artistic success as a marker of the broader successes of the French regime.⁷⁶ Athens is a telling role model because of the ways in which the quality of its art had been linked with the political freedom of democracy since Winckelmann (for more on this subject, see chapter 2).

Despite the symbolic usefulness of ancient models, little was done with the antiquities collection before the arrival of the art captured from Italy in 1798.⁷⁷ This was similarly framed in ancient terms, this time as a Roman triumph. This implied that France had captured the artistic fruits of ancient Greece, just like Rome before it, and thus demonstrated its status as the natural heir of both. Again, antiquities were a way to assert cultural, political and military superiority. The republican elements of this emulation was underlined by the fact that only two statues were specified in the treaty of Tolentino, both of Brutus, and these received pride of place in the march.⁷⁸

The Louvre has been seen as a manifestation of a new world view that redefined museums and an example of the changed models of authority and knowledge associated with Foucault's modern episteme - creating new subject

⁷⁵ Dyson, *In Pursuit of Ancient Pasts*, 20-21.

⁷⁶ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 93.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁸ Patricia Mainardi, "Assuring the Empire of the Future: The 1798 Fête De La Liberté." *Art Journal* 48, 2 (1989): 155-163.

positions and new structures of knowledge.⁷⁹ In practical terms, this meant rearranging the collections chronologically to offer an education in the development of art and purify paintings of bad associations.⁸⁰ This emphasis on telling history was both didactic and ideological. Chronology provided an art historical framework to help the uninitiated to understand art, enabling it to move out of its old elite display contexts and become accessible and meaningful to the bourgeois public sphere.⁸¹ It also provided a fertile ground for fostering national identity, presenting France as the culmination of a world history of art and culture.⁸² It is easy to see why an institution created out of great political upheaval might want to present itself as the latest development in a long history of art and society. But chronology proved a useful tool in many different museum contexts. It was probably first adopted in Dusseldorf in 1756, although other collections soon followed suit.⁸³

For obvious reasons, a chronological approach depends on an understanding of the history of art. The idea of art as having developed over time and having a traceable history has origins in ancient authors especially, as we have seen, in Pliny the Elder. Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (published in 1764) traced a story of gradual development through Egyptian, Phoenician, Persian, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman art, further dividing Greek art into a progression of four styles.⁸⁴ In museums, Winckelmann's scheme meant that dating became important, not only as part of a full understanding of an object, but also in establishing its value and aesthetic quality. It probably contributed to

⁷⁹ Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 167-190.

⁸⁰ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 108-114.

⁸¹ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 25-7.

⁸² Duncan and Wallach. "The Universal Survey Museum."

⁸³ Bazin, *The Museum Age*, 159.

⁸⁴ J.J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 227-244.

some optimistic dating mistakes, such as that of the Aphrodite found on the island of Melos (later known as the Venus de Milo) which was hailed at the time of its discovery as a work of Praxiteles, now widely accepted as a later work.⁸⁵ While the idea of chronological development was an appealing way to understand ancient art, it was not an easy one to reflect in museum display. Many museums struggled with adopting a chronological arrangement because their collections could not represent this development. For example, the concentration of Roman copies in the *Musée Napoleon* maintained a topical display for antique sculpture (like the one at the Pio Clementino) even though paintings had long been arranged in a chronology for educational purposes.⁸⁶ We will explore the difficult relationship between chronology and the broadly thematic displays it replaced in chapter 3.

The difficulties in fitting extant objects into a historical narrative derived from ancient sources fuelled a desire for other ways to date and interpret ancient material. This was especially the case for those studying geographical areas or time periods with rich material records but no ancient texts to explain them. A number of alternative approaches to the human past coexisted in the nineteenth century, including historical, philological, ethnological and Thomsen's Three Age System. This latter system allowed archaeologists to determine the relative date of sites and to fit individual objects into a broader scheme of development based on the idea of technological progress in tool-making (from stone, through bronze to iron) and other materials.⁸⁷ The object-focused nature of this scheme reflects the museum context in which it developed and it became particularly

⁸⁵ Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the antique*, 328-30.

⁸⁶ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 153.

⁸⁷ Peter Rowley-Conwy, *From Genesis to Prehistory: The Archaeological Three Age System and its Contested Reception in Denmark, Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

helpful in understanding and arranging museum collections.⁸⁸ Along with other materially focused techniques (especially stratigraphy) it provided the underpinnings of archaeology as we know it today. It made it possible to fit objects into an explanatory system that did not require literary texts, but which still looked like a familiar narrative of progress, with nations and ages.

Another narrative of continuous progress that proved particularly important for museums was evolution. It reframed natural history collections as a narrative, not a system of classification and meant that humans had a much deeper history than had previously been thought. It also established connections between geology, natural history and archaeology, bringing together the histories of the world, life and civilisation into a single narrative. As a result, evolution had an impact on museums beyond the natural history collections to which it was most applicable. In archaeology, it offered the chance to study a deeper human history through humanity's own evolution. But it also had a wider impact on the way people thought about the past, offering a model of civilisation as something that obeys similar rules of competition and progress to species within nature. The Pitt-Rivers Museum used its display approach to juxtapose objects made far away with objects made long ago, implying that both represented primitive stages in a deterministic development, with obvious racist implications for those societies seen as primitive. Applying the idea of evolution to progress within human societies meant that evolutionary displays in museums could convey ideological messages about the visitor's place in world (with some visitors superior to others) and raise the possibility that the museum could be both illustration and instrument of progress.⁸⁹ Darwinism was also assimilated to the development of classical art through the concept of the great Chain of Art with its sense of gradual development by trial and error.

⁸⁸ Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 299-300.

⁸⁹ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 177-9.

However, while this was conveyed in language reminiscent of science, it maintained Winckelmann's idea of decline after the high classical. While these discourses were only superficially compatible, the combination of the two demonstrates the desire for simple, coherent narratives of progress that has had a lasting impact on museums.⁹⁰

While evolution seemed to offer a simple narrative that could cross disciplines, there was also a growing sense of specialisation in different types of material and approaches that created rifts and disciplinary boundaries that would ultimately separate collections. The effects of this specialisation can be seen in the expulsion of natural history collections from the British Museum and the split between anthropology and the cast collections that briefly shared a museum in Cambridge.⁹¹ Museums played an active role in constituting disciplines by negotiating their conceptual territory.⁹² This was particularly difficult for objects from Greece and Rome, because these were highly valued by a wide range of groups, including art historians, archaeologists and philologists. Philologists were uncomfortable with the idea of archaeology as an independent discipline.⁹³ Those who prioritised aesthetics wanted to bring together high art, ancient and modern, excluding lesser material - although where to draw the lines was never clear.⁹⁴ Conflict was inevitable and academic fashions and disputes inevitably shaped museums.

⁹⁰ Dominic Janes, "The Rites of Man: The British Museum and the Sexual Imagination in Victorian Britain," *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, 1 (October 2007): 101-112.

⁹¹ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 208-210; Mary Beard, "Casts and Cast-offs: the Origins of the Museum of Classical Archaeology," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 39 (1993) 1-29.

⁹² Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*.

⁹³ Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*, 10.

⁹⁴ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, 93-100.

Looking closely at narratives in the museum is a powerful way to get to the heart of such boundary disputes. Not only are disciplinary frameworks an important part of constituting and justifying museums' grand narratives but, as a form that crosses different kinds of evidence about the ancient world, narrative can be a powerful way of exploring disciplinary tensions. The grand narratives discussed in this section have become defining features of traditional museums, but they are widely challenged today for their ideological content. This thesis aims to deepen our understanding of these grand narratives, but also to ask what place there is for other kinds of stories in museums. The final section of this chapter looks at the ambivalence towards narrative in recent approaches to the study of museums.

Narrative today

Museums are one of our culture's major contexts for thinking about history but also institutions with histories of their own and, in turn, products of the deeper history of our relationship with objects. They owe much to their past and many of the collections, display techniques and preoccupations we can see in museums today were laid down in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ This is especially so for classical collections outside source countries, which are largely the result of collecting before antiquities laws were introduced in those countries. Although classical antiquities are often held by larger, more conservative museums, the way they are understood and presented is starting to change. The presence of antiquities from Greece and Rome in collections around the world no longer feels natural. The way these cultures are given emphasis in museums' decor and architecture inevitably seems strange as a result of this shift. Indeed, even the clear narratives of historical development traditionally told by museums are now subject to doubt.

We began this chapter with an example of a museum displaying its own history. This is not a trend that is limited to the British Museum; in fact several recent redisplays of classical material have dealt with the history of museums and collections. When the Neues Museum in Berlin reopened in 2010, after renovation to repair the extensive damage it suffered in the Second World War, its designers made sure that the building displayed its scars and ruptures. As a result of this decision, the Neues Museum represents its own history as much as that of the objects in its collections.⁹⁶ While this is a particularly dramatic example of a museum telling its own history, it is far from isolated. The Ashmolean's recent redisplay foregrounded the museum's origins in John Tradescant's cabinet of curiosities and tells stories of excavators and collectors

⁹⁵ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 1-2.

⁹⁶ Giles Waterfield, "Restoring Order," *Museum Practice* (spring 2010): 12-17.

throughout its galleries. While the Fitzwilliam's redisplayed Greece and Rome gallery assumes less specialist knowledge than the display it replaced, it also tries to reflect the cutting edge of classics; as a result it takes a strong interest in what has happened to the objects on display since their discovery.⁹⁷

These approaches are well-suited to the changing theoretical context of museums. Increased interest in the study of museums has generated a number of critiques of traditional museum display. These have pointed out how museums tend to be used to support existing power structures and often marginalise or exclude less powerful groups.⁹⁸ The result is a discomfort with the grand narratives that once structured museum displays. Looking closely at museum display also shows how odd the museum is as a form of cultural expression: most museum objects were never intended for museum display and the very the act of collecting them has changed their meaning.⁹⁹ The growing awareness of the problems of museum display has also generated a greater interest in the question of how to get it right. There is now a dauntingly large literature giving guidance to museums on communicating with their audiences, which tends to stress the plurality of possible readings for each object and every collection.¹⁰⁰ The historical approach to museums offers a way to acknowledge the narratives and priorities that structured the collections and buildings we see today, while showing that we no longer share these priorities and allowing scope for other perspectives.

⁹⁷ "About the Greek and Roman Gallery Project" Last accessed, January 31, 2013 <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/dept/ant/greeceandrome/projects/gr/intro.html>.

⁹⁸ Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, "The Universal Survey Museum."

⁹⁹ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: an Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 393.

¹⁰⁰ e.g. Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 179-210; John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (Washington: Whalesback, 1992), 138-141.

Classical antiquities have suffered a relative loss of status and are no longer conceived as the pinnacle of human achievement. Instead, there has been a shift in museums towards cultural relativism, although this does not always mean that cultures are truly presented as equals.¹⁰¹ Museums that idealised the classical played an important role in the shifts in taste from classical to modern aesthetics that ultimately undermined the status of classical antiquities.¹⁰² As a result, old ideas about the superiority of classical art and culture have shaped collections and often the space in which they are displayed. Museum displays that take an interest in the history of museums and collecting offer an opportunity to show these ideas and the collections themselves as products of a particular time and place. They allow museums to explain ideas that no longer seem obvious to visitors. This approach reflects a growing academic interest in the history of objects beyond their originally intended use and offers a way for museums to reflect on the debt their collections owe to their history, while giving a real sense of what has changed.

A museum displaying its own past modes of display and systems of thought inevitably raises questions about the relationship between this displayed past (e.g. the “Enlightenment”) and the past it mediates (e.g. classical antiquity) as well as how this relates to the museum in the present and to us as viewers. The most obvious effect is to show the difference between then and now. This process can be quaintly othering (did they really have giraffes near the Greek vases?) or unsettlingly othering (were they really that racist?), but it can also offer a teleological account of how the museum we know came to exist. This can be felt most strongly when museums use their history to justify the ownership

¹⁰¹ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 221-230; A. E. Coombes, “Ethnography, Popular Culture and Institutional Power: Narratives of Benin Culture in the British Museum, 1897-1992” in *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, ed. G. Wright (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1996), 143-157.

¹⁰² Suzanne Marchand, “The Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns in the German Museums,” in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 179-199.

of contested objects. The Enlightenment gallery works in this way by presenting the British Museum as an unrivalled example of Enlightenment systems of knowledge and so underlining the British Museum's assertion that, because of this historical importance, the integrity of its collections must be maintained.¹⁰³ Historical displays are a clear demonstration of how museum histories are not confined to the history books: indeed museums' histories have never been more relevant to their everyday function. They offer a way to explain this somewhat weird cultural form and serve as a way to explore what museums should and should not be. The importance of museum history means that it is hotly contested and (as we shall see) often far from straightforward.

It can be challenging to communicate the complexities of any version of history in a museum display, especially since the new museology, post processual archaeology and a wave of post-modernist thought that questions whether such accounts can ever be objective. Despite current discomfort with the strong, linear narratives of historical progression that used to frame museum displays, stories remain an important part of how museums operate, and can even be used to disrupt traditional approaches.¹⁰⁴ Narrative has become something of a buzz word for how to do things right. As O'Neill puts it:

Good stories can function at different levels for different people. They engage the imagination, intellect, memories and emotions of visitors and can have rich resonances without requiring more detail than is possible in a museum. Stories inspire visitors to bring far more of their own meaning-making capacity to the museum objects and this makes the museum's task easier. In fact, it is only this capacity of visitors that makes museums' task possible at all...Good stories are strong enough to

¹⁰³ Mark O'Neill, "Enlightenment Museums: Universal or Merely Global?"

¹⁰⁴ e.g. Mary Beard and John Henderson, "The Play of Desire: Casting Euripides' Hippolytus" *Arion* 4, 3 (1997): 80–130.

hold together the range of objects in interdisciplinary displays; they can provide the context for the meanings of objects, without undermining their aesthetic power. Storytelling enables the museum to ask and answer questions about objects in an open-ended rather than a closed way, and to make statements of significance without preempting the visitor's own judgement or overwhelming her experience.¹⁰⁵

Looked at in these terms, narrative is something of a cure-all for the challenges of museum interpretation.¹⁰⁶ Advocates for narrative in museums tend to stress that it is a fundamental part of how humans make sense of their identity and the world around them. Therefore it is not the fact that museums are suddenly interested in telling stories, but the shift in the type of stories that makes a difference. The narratives chosen by museums tell us a lot about their aims, whether it is finding small, relatable stories to make sense of individual objects, or telling of the rise and fall of nations.

This thesis will explore how narratives selected by museums reflect priorities and interests and shape how the past is experienced. This is a big theme, and (apart from sections that lay the groundwork) I have had to limit myself to the museum in its modern form (from the nineteenth century onwards) rather than looking at its many precursors. The fact that these are active questions in museums today has meant that I have brought the discussion up to the present day, but most of the focus lies on the period between 1810 and 1960. The structure is broadly chronological but, because museums are institutions that are constantly negotiating ancient and more recent history, I have had to look

¹⁰⁵ Mark O'Neill, "Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Epistemology of Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 21, 2 (2006): 95–116.

¹⁰⁶ See also: L.C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Vivien Golding, "Meaning and truth in Multicultural Museum Education," in *Cultural Diversity: Developing Museum Audiences in Britain* ed. Hooper-Greenhill (Leicester:Leicester University Press, 1997), 203–225.

backwards or forwards at times to make sense of the material discussed. For each chapter I have tried to draw out a theme that captures that particular museum at the time, and allows it to speak for broader issues.

I have also had to place some limits on the geographical scope of this thesis. It is limited to museums and temporary exhibitions in London and Cambridge, with material from elsewhere occasionally used for comparison. These are the museums which have been most intensively studied by other scholars, which made it easier to find case studies to fit with the thematic focus of this thesis. It does mean that this thesis does little to reflect the importance of regional museums in the late nineteenth century, although I have no doubt that there are other, equally interesting, stories to be told about these institutions.

The focus of this this thesis has also mainly been limited to ancient Greek archaeology and narratives, with some Roman ones added for context. I will show how notions of the classical were deeply important, even for collections, that contained much older, non-Greek material, such as Schliemann's discoveries from Troy. But this focus has meant passing over other important ancient narratives, such as the biblical ones that were used to frame many middle eastern collections.

Despite some of the challenges of finding relevant case studies and responding to the many possible varieties of narrative, asking a thematic question about the way museums interpret objects has had some advantages. Its emphasis on the meanings attached to objects has required me to do more than simply tell institution or object histories. It has demanded an engagement with some of the more ephemeral features of museums, including temporary displays of which little survives. Where possible, I have tried to reconstruct displays to get a sense of museums' approaches and aims in the past. Shifting what we look at in museum histories can mean some surprising divergences from the standard topics of museum histories and new angles on the conventional ones.

I will start by looking at the acquisition of Lord Elgin's collection (including the sculpture he removed from the Parthenon). This is seen as a pivotal point in the collecting of classical art and, as a result, has been widely discussed. It was also much debated at the time - because the marbles were radically different from what had been collected before, and their ownership was not clear. This chapter looks at the debates over the acquisition of this collection and how ancient writers were used to give it historical context and fit it into broader conceptions of art history and national identity. It then goes on to look at the reception of the marbles in political thought and materials for public education. It shows how narratives of Athens' political and artistic superiority, derived from ancient authors, could not only explain these objects, but also give them a place in contemporary political debates and in defining the role of the museum.

The next chapter will take a different approach: looking at the various roles played by Greek myth in museum interpretation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores curatorial and interpretive practice at the British Museum through statements of policy, gallery arrangement and public talks, then compares it with two influential temporary exhibitions held in other London institutions. This chapter contrasts two different approaches to myth in museums. The first, represented by Charles Newton's and Jane Harrison's work at the British Museum, was interested in the stories depicted on objects and the information they could provide about ancient culture. The second, represented by temporary exhibitions by Heinrich Schliemann and Arthur Evans, looks at the use of stories about ancient sites to make sense of the objects found there. While the two approaches seem very different, I will explore how both tapped into an interest in communicating the ancient world to a broad public and showed high hopes for how much archaeology could extend knowledge about the past beyond the contents of ancient texts.

Chapter four focuses on university museums in the twentieth century, asking how the newly-professionalised discipline of archaeology made sense of its less rigorous forebears. By looking at the acquisition of privately collected objects at the Fitzwilliam, I explore the factors that influenced the museum's day-to-day collecting and ask what made a desirable or an undesirable object. At this time, archaeologists are generally considered to have moved on to more object-based strategies, but looking at the ways in which ancient narrative still cropped up in museums' collecting decisions shows the longevity of past values in museums and the difficulties of engaging with objects that are the product of a complex network of classical reception. Its central case study, a fake gold diadem, reportedly found on the island of Ithaca, shows how nineteenth century travellers mediated their experiences through personal readings of ancient stories. This engagement with archaeology through ancient stories was completely alien to people working within twentieth century models of value and authenticity, and this chapter shows how the gap between the two approaches has led to misunderstandings of museum objects.

Chapter five will look at an example of an exhibition with aims that are anything but archaeological. It looks at one of a series of exhibitions of Greek art that were collaboratively organised by the Greek and British governments during World War Two. This exhibition echoes the nationalism and idealisation of ancient Greece seen in the acquisition of the Elgin collection, while reflecting a very different political situation. This chapter looks at the ways this exhibition used quotations from and performances of ancient literature to argue for the importance of Greece (both ancient and modern) to Britain and Europe. Despite having such apparently clear, government-directed aims, this exhibition also represented some highly idiosyncratic theories of ancient art. By looking more closely at the ancient texts and narratives deployed in its interpretation, we will also see how its organiser, Charles Seltman, used it to explore changing notions

of art and reveal unease about the relationship between image and text in ancient sources.

Because of the enduring relevance of museum histories to the way museums see themselves in the present, the conclusion of this thesis will use the ideas explored in its previous sections to analyse some recent museum displays. It will explore the current fashion for interpreting the ancients “in their own words,” considering why this might be desirable, what it reveals about our relationship with the past and whether it is truly possible to let the ancients speak for themselves in a museum.

2. The Elgin marbles: buying into a political ideal

Few events in museum history have attracted as much interest (and indeed controversy) as the acquisition of the Elgin collection. This collection included a wide range of antiquities, from ancient medals to a giant Egyptian scarab, but Elgin's most famous and controversial acquisitions were the sculpted decoration he had removed from the Parthenon in Athens.¹⁰⁷ The modern debates over the collection's status and ownership can be traced back to the 1816 Select Committee hearings over whether the British Government should buy the collection. The Select Committee raised questions over the Elgin Marbles' value, condition, date of production and rightful ownership. As a result, the report published by the Select Committee has proved a fertile source for understanding the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the Elgin collection. It has been used to explore the question of ownership and as a source in specific histories of individuals, institutions or the marbles themselves.¹⁰⁸ But it has also proved important for exploring the way the collection was perceived and how it related to rapidly changing ideas about taste and the role of the museum.

The Elgin acquisition has been seen as marking a number of important changes in the understanding of museums and classical archaeology. Previous collections of classical antiquities had been largely acquired in Italy and were most often Roman copies. By contrast, the sculptures from the Parthenon were

¹⁰⁷ I have chosen to refer to the whole collection as the Elgin collection, and the material taken by Elgin from the Parthenon as the Elgin Marbles. While "Parthenon sculptures" is the preferred terminology of the British Museum and the Greek Government favours "Parthenon marbles," neither of these clearly distinguishes between the collection in the British museum and those elsewhere. "Elgin Marbles" has the benefit of being more compact than "Parthenon marbles in the British Museum" and reflects the way they were described in the nineteenth century sources.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Hitchens, Robert Browning, and Graham Binns, *The Elgin Marbles: Should They Be Returned to Greece?* (London and New York: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 49-59; William St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 18-19; Cook, B, *The Elgin Marbles* (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 84-88.

original Greek works from the period traditionally seen as the peak of ancient art, created (or at least overseen by) a known big-name artist. They looked very different from what came before and forced people to reevaluate their expectations about classical art.¹⁰⁹ Even once their value had been established, they became a focus of the boundary disputes that shaped the museums of London and the disciplines they represent.¹¹⁰

Their status as architectural sculptures meant that the marbles looked radically different - they formed groupings dependent on the shape of the building they decorated. Removing such large groups of sculptures, embedded in buildings, also required a lot more logistical support. For example, Elgin depended on his role as ambassador to gain access to the Acropolis and used British warships for transporting the marbles. This fitted with a general trend towards nations competing for access to classical antiquities and using them to demonstrate their superiority.¹¹¹ The marbles' role in British national identity has also raised some interest, since Britain was explicitly identified with the power and freedom of ancient Athens as justification for the acquisition and in subsequent adoptions of the marbles' imagery by architects and public institutions.¹¹²

In all of this, ancient texts were crucial for making sense of the Elgin marbles. Many of the pieces of information that made the marbles important (e.g. date, historical context, attribution to Phidias) were established with reference to

¹⁰⁹ Jonah Siegel, "Towards a public art collection" in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 37; Frederick Cummings, "Phidias in Bloomsbury: B.R. Haydon's Drawings of the Elgin Marbles," *Burlington Magazine* 106, 736 (2010): 322-328.

¹¹⁰ Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, 77-100.

¹¹¹ Holger Hoock, "The British State and the Anglo-French Wars over Antiquities, 1798-1858," *The Historical Journal* 50, 1 (2007): 49-72.

¹¹² Ian Jenkins, "Athens Rising Near the Pole: London, Athens and the Idea of Freedom" in *London-World City, 1800-1840* ed. Celina Fox (London and New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of London, 1992), 143-153; Debbie Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," *The British Art Journal* VII, 1 (2006): 33-39.

ancient authors. This makes the marbles a perfect case study for understanding the ways in which ancient narratives could operate to give value and meaning to ancient objects. As a result, this chapter will lay a lot of the foundations for the rest of this thesis, exploring why classical objects (particularly fifth century B.C. Athenian sculpture) were so highly valued, how people constitute their ideas of the past and the relationship between museums and their political context.

In this chapter I will look at the role of ancient texts and the narratives they contain in the reception of the Elgin marbles. I will begin by looking at how these texts shaped perceptions of the marbles themselves and show the importance of historical information, even in a process that prioritised the views of artists. I will consider the questions raised over the Elgin Marbles' authenticity and what this tells us about why they were valued. Then, I will look at how the conclusions of the report tap into ideas about the political circumstances in ancient Athens to claim a social and political role for the marbles in contemporary London. Their symbolic importance made the Elgin marbles a focus for political debate that could be used by very different ideologies. The idea of this collection as fundamentally public art (derived from ancient sources) shaped how the public were expected to experience ancient Greek art and continues to shape the marbles' discursive role.

Evaluating the Elgin collection through ancient sources

The Select Committee of 1816 aimed to answer four questions: two of which were concerned with rights of ownership and two with value.¹¹³ This means that much of the report deals with the events of the recent past, such as the circumstances surrounding the marbles' removal from Athens and recent sales of comparable collections. However, their date, creators, meaning, ancient reception and circumstances of creation all became important factors in judging their artistic and market value in the present. The report draws on a number of ancient sources (both directly and indirectly) to answer such questions. The way these texts were used can tell us a lot about the relative status of art and text and how they interacted in the debates around museums.

The two competing disciplines of art history and archaeology have rightly been seen as a major force in shaping London's museums in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁴ In this case, the Select Committee report seems to have prioritised artistic value over historical concerns.¹¹⁵ A large proportion of the witnesses who were asked to comment on the value and significance of the collection were artists, and still some were outraged after the report that more priority was not given to artists.¹¹⁶ The committee's level of interest in antiquarian opinion was fairly low. For example, the British Museum's keeper of antiquities, Taylor Coombe, was questioned briefly but he was not questioned about the marbles at all, only the medals.¹¹⁷ This may partly be because Coombe was a

¹¹³ *Report from the Select Committee on the Earl of Elgin's Collection of Sculpted Marbles &c.*, 1816., 3.

¹¹⁴ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*.

¹¹⁵ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, 82.

¹¹⁶ St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*, 257.

¹¹⁷ Select Committee, 1816, Evidence given by Taylor Coombe, 47.

specialist in numismatics, but he had also recently published a catalogue of sculpture and was amply qualified to comment on the marbles.¹¹⁸

Despite this apparent bias towards an aesthetic approach to the Elgin marbles the report actually shows quite a strong interest in the historical significance of the collection. The final report gives a decent summary of what the extant ancient sources say about the building of the Parthenon.¹¹⁹ It does conveniently ignore some of the more problematic mentions, including Plutarch's description of ancient opposition to the building which saw it as a vulgar waste of money.¹²⁰ The Select Committee report also used ancient sources to give broader background on the artists and to evaluate whether the Roman Emperor Hadrian could have added to the building.¹²¹ This reflects the use of ancient sources repeatedly throughout the evidence given to the Select Committee. These sources were used to answer the sort of questions relevant to any connoisseur buying a work of art, such as artist, date and value.

We have already seen (in chapter 1) the role ancient texts could play in validating statuary. Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, with its convenient list of the best works proved particularly useful in this respect and, unsurprisingly, witnesses were keen to tie the Parthenon into it:

I have every reason to believe that they were executed by Phidias... as we are informed he was the artist principally employed by Perikles and his principal scholars, mentioned by Pliny...¹²²

¹¹⁸ Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 60, 74.

¹¹⁹ Select Committee, 1816, 11-12.

¹²⁰ Plut. *Vit. Per.* 12.1-3.

¹²¹ Select Committee, 1816, 11-12.

¹²² Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Flaxman, 31.

Pliny's mentions of the Parthenon are brief and do not specifically discuss the architectural sculpture that was on offer to the Select Committee. But even a brief mention, associating a well known artist with it, was enough to offer the validation of ancient approval:

in this respect they are superior to almost any works except the Laocoon and Toro Farnese; because they are known to have been executed by the artists whose names are recorded by the ancient authors.¹²³

As a result, Pliny was an important point of reference for the Select Committee, and was mentioned several times in the final report.¹²⁴

Even when the committee attempted to judge the collection by comparison to other sculpture, many of the comparators used as examples of the very best classical art were pieces identified with ancient descriptions. There are exceptions to this rule, which show that the canon laid down in Pliny had been mediated and supplemented by other sets of ideas. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the *Apollo Belvedere*, which was widely considered a masterpiece, even after it was acknowledged that it was a copy.¹²⁵ Such Roman statues had been recognised as copies of Greek originals by this period, but were not yet systematically valued for the clues they could give to the lost originals or Roman tastes and priorities.¹²⁶ In the Select Committee report, the result was an odd kind of ambivalence, in which the *Apollo Belvedere* was still seen as one of the best examples of ideal beauty, but its authenticity was doubted. In this atmosphere, the fact that Pliny does not mention the statue was clearly seen as

¹²³ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Flaxman, 31.

¹²⁴ Select Committee, 1816, 11-12.

¹²⁵ Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 149-150.

¹²⁶ Olga Palagia and J.J. Pollitt ed., *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-15.

problematic, since the artist John Flaxman raised it as a reason to doubt the statue's originality.¹²⁷

In the face of uncertainties about the value and meaning of ancient sculpture, ancient texts offered an important source of information. The authors mentioned by the Select Committee are mostly those that dealt directly with art (Pliny, Pausanias) or the building of the Parthenon (Plutarch), but ancient texts could also be used, even if they appeared unrelated to art.¹²⁸ For example, the artist John Flaxman answered a question about how he could tell that the metopes were of "high antiquity" with a detailed reference to the medical writings of Hippocrates. These offered information about anatomical understanding that he used in a highly technical approach to stylistic dating:

Hippocrates describes the edges of the ribs as forming a semicircle at the bottom of the upper thorax; he describes, with some accuracy, the meeting and form of the upper part of the scapula and acromion with the collar bone; that part is particularly marked in these figures.... In a few words, the form of the body has a classification of a simple kind in a few parts, such as I find in the ancient anatomists, and such as are common in the outlines of the painted Greek vases; besides, as far as I can judge from our documents of antiquity, the painted Greek vases for example, those that come nearer to the time in which these marbles are believed to be produced, are conceived in the same character, and drawn in the same manner.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Flaxman, 32.

¹²⁸ Select Committee, 1816. For Pliny: Final report, 11-12; evidence given by Flaxman, 31-32. For Pausanias: Final report, 11-12, 14; evidence given by Flaxman, 32; evidence given by Wilkins, 45. For Plutarch: Final report, 11, 14; evidence given by Richard Payne Knight, 39, 42; evidence given by Wilkins, 45-46.

¹²⁹ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Flaxman, 33.

The use of a medical writer may reflect the emphasis on anatomy in contemporary artistic training and in Flaxman's own work.¹³⁰ This use of texts alongside contemporary objects shows that ancient writers were not only being used uncritically as sources of basic information, but could also be brought together with a range of archaeological material in quite sophisticated stylistic analyses. For Flaxman, this medical approach was linked with the wider conditions of Athenian society:

the distinctions of the body, when they have been taken from the finest nature in the highest state of exercise, and in the best condition, in all respects, which might be expected from those who possessed great personal beauty and cultivated habits of living, most likely to produce it and who were accustomed to see it frequently in public exercises.¹³¹

Hippocrates' descriptions of Athenian exercise culture fit the physical condition of the figures in the Parthenon sculpture. But this also implicitly links beauty in art and in physical form to the Athenian way of life. This view of the interconnectedness of Athenian art and society can be traced back to Winckelmann's interpretation of ancient homoeroticism but has wider implications for art history.¹³² It not only allows for the application of texts that would not otherwise be relevant, but also allows an elevated view of art's status to something relevant to wider society, responding to intellectual developments from other fields. This fits better with the nineteenth-century view of art than the idea closer to craftsmanship conveyed by some ancient sources, including the sources eagerly drawn on by the Select Committee for other purposes. For

¹³⁰ Anita Herle, et al. *Assembling Bodies: Art, Science and Imagination* (Cambridge: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, 2009), 39-41.

¹³¹ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Flaxman, 33.

¹³² Whitney Davis, "Winckelmann's Homosexual Teleologies," in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy* ed. Natalie Kampen and Bettina Ann Bergmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 262-276.

example, Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* stresses the difference between admiring Phidias' statues and valuing the lowly manual labour of an artist.¹³³ The Select Committee's use of ancient sources that devalue Phidias to celebrate and elevate him shows a selective approach to ancient texts which takes an interest in the ancient world, but does not necessarily share its priorities.

The allure of a text that offers named artists and recognisable patterns of connoisseurship is clear. It offered validation not only for admiring particular statues, but also for the practice of treating ancient imagery as art in the modern sense. There is clear scope for anachronism, given the distance of time and culture between Pliny and Periclean Athens, let alone the additional distance to a nineteenth-century museum.¹³⁴ The temptation to imagine ancient artists in modern terms can be seen in the report:

in the fabulous stories which are represented upon both, there is a very striking similarity; and it may be remarked in passing, that the subject of the Metopes and of the smaller Frize [sic]...correspond with two out of the four subjects mentioned by Pliny as adorning the shield and dress of the Minerva; so that there was a general uniformity of design in the stories which were selected for the internal, and external decoration of the Parthenon. The taste of the same artist, Ictinus, probably led him to repeat the same ideas, which abound in graceful forms; and variety of composition, when he was employed upon the temple of another divinity at a distance from Athens.¹³⁵

Here Pliny's description of the Parthenon's imagery is brought into the report's only discussion of the building's iconography. The focus is not on the meanings

¹³³ Plut. *Vit. Per.*, 2.1-2.

¹³⁴ J.J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-2.

¹³⁵ Select Committee Report, 1816, 11.

and ideological significance of the decoration, as analyses of temple decoration tend to be today.¹³⁶ Rather, it sees the choice of theme as a result of the personal preference of an autonomous artist. This is particularly interesting given the decision to focus on Ictinus when, in fact, Pliny's discussion of the shield of Athena specifically describes it as the work of Phidias.¹³⁷ The report has already concluded that the hand of Phidias is probably not present throughout the Elgin Marbles, so this pessimism might have transferred to the lost statue.¹³⁸

However, there are also positive reasons for the committee wanting to see this as the work of Ictinus: by underlining that the Parthenon and the Temple of Apollo at Bassae share an architect and decorative themes, the report shows an interest in building a coherent, interconnected collection that would enable people to trace the development of artists and schools, just as one might in a gallery of more recent art.

We saw in chapter 1 some of the difficulties in deciding whether art in the modern sense existed in the ancient world and the tendency to project modern ideas back onto the past. The ways in which ancient art and texts are used clearly reflect contemporary ideas of art, but that is not to say that the conception of the Elgin marbles was clear and fixed. The scope for divergent readings can be seen in the accusations made by Richard Payne Knight (an influential writer on antiquities and taste) that the Elgin Marbles were not original works of classical Greek sculpture.¹³⁹ Knight used the same ancient

¹³⁶ e.g. David Castriota, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

¹³⁷ Plin. *HN.*, 36.18-20, trans. Healy, J. F. (Penguin, 1991).

¹³⁸ Select Committee Report, 1816. 11.

¹³⁹ C. Stumpf-Condry and S. J. Skedd, 'Knight, Richard Payne (1751–1824)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/15/101015733/>.

sources that were used throughout the report to claim the collection's status as authentic works of fifth century B.C. Athens in an argument against this dating:

We know from the authority of Plutarch, that those of the Temple of Minerva, which are the principal, were executed by Callicrates and Ictinus, and their assistants and scholars; and I think some were added in the time of Hadrian, from the style of them.¹⁴⁰

This had the potential to seriously undermine the value of the collection: Elgin specifically mentions the "allusions to classical authority" in Knight's claims as a reason why they were taken seriously.¹⁴¹ In fact, there was nothing in these sources on later additions to the Parthenon, and Knight freely admitted that his reasons for the Hadrianic date were stylistic. Hadrian's benefactions to Athens are well documented, but do not include the Parthenon.¹⁴²

Yet the doubts Knight raised certainly seem to have been taken seriously by the Select Committee. Considerable care was taken in the final report to refute him.¹⁴³ It is understandable, given the recent demotion of many of the icons of ancient art to the status of copies and accompanying changes to taste, that the committee would be wary of another such shift that would devalue the Elgin collection. The ancient texts that seemed to offer authoritative accounts of the artists and date of the Parthenon were little help in determining whether the building and its sculptures had been modified by subsequent generations. The possibility, however remote, that the Parthenon sculptures might be copies from the time of Hadrian is a reminder of the risks of collecting and interpreting ancient material. This is the real force of Knight's objections to the Elgin

¹⁴⁰ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Richard Payne Knight, 39.

¹⁴¹ Select Committee, 1816, 62.

¹⁴² Mary.T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 144-57.

¹⁴³ Select Committee, 1816, 14.

Marbles. Despite the high value placed on some sculptures created under Hadrian, there is no question that they were deemed less valuable than Greek originals from the fifth Century B.C. Indeed, it was the idea of Hadrian's engagement with classical Greek art that shaped responses to Hadrianic art, from Winckelmann to the present.¹⁴⁴

The status of the Elgin Marbles was based on the idea that there is something special about Greek art of the fifth century B.C. This period was referred to repeatedly as "the best time," and there is no challenge in the report to the idea that this was the high point of Greek art.¹⁴⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, this is a narrative derived from ancient authors, particularly Pliny. While the Elgin collection was highly valued for having been made at this supposed peak of ancient art, later sculpture could still be valued highly for other reasons. In his evidence to the committee, the artist Sir Richard Westmacott admitted that the marbles had little value under old models of collecting, in which classical sculpture was little more than "furniture." Instead, he saw them as suited to a national collection:

This collection [i.e. the Elgin collection] I consider as more a collection for government, and to form a school of study...¹⁴⁶

The idea of studying the marbles reflects his priorities as a member of the Royal Academy, but he also implies a role for the marbles beyond serving as an aesthetic model for contemporary art. The "for government" hints at a national or political purpose, as if something about the marbles and their history makes them particularly suited to being in a museum.

¹⁴⁴ J.J. Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 340; Caroline Vout, "What's in a Beard? Rethinking Hadrian's Hellenism," in *Rethinking Revolutions Through Ancient Greece* ed. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 96-123.

¹⁴⁵ Select Committee, 1816. Final report, 10, Evidence given by Hamilton, 29. Evidence given by Earl of Aberdeen, 48.

¹⁴⁶ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence given by Westmacott, 36.

This enigmatic statement may echo the idea that the aesthetic qualities of classical art were a direct result of the political freedoms enjoyed by Athenian citizens. Classical Greek art was seen as an ideal to be emulated by artists. It owed this status to narratives of progress and decline that encompassed moral and political implications for wider society. While there was not much discussion of the political circumstances of the building of the Parthenon in the evidence given before the Select Committee, this context played an important role in the conclusions of the final report. The next section looks at how the idea of classical Athens as a political and artistic ideal was used to make claims for the marbles' place in nineteenth-century Britain.

Ancient ideals and ancient marbles

Ancient texts are used throughout the report to provide information or justify opinions about the Elgin collection. But there are also deeper values drawn from ancient literature at the root of the eventual recommendation to purchase the collection. History is most referenced in the evidence as a record of the time and place that created the marbles, but the conclusion draws on this history to answer the question of where they *should* go and whether they can ultimately belong in the British Museum. It equates the perceived political and artistic excellence of ancient Athens with the present conditions and future aspirations of Britain:

But if it be true, as we learn from history and experience that free governments afford a soil most suitable to the production of native talent, to the maturing of the powers of the human mind, and to the growth of every species of excellence, by opening to merit the prospect of reward and distinction, no country can be better adapted than our own to afford an honourable asylum to these monuments of the school of Phidias, and of the administration of Pericles; where secure from further injury and degradation, they may receive that admiration and homage to which they are entitled, and serve in return as models and examples to those, who by knowing how to revere and appreciate them, may learn first to imitate, and ultimately to rival them.¹⁴⁷

This passage has been seen as pivotal to the acquisition of the collection, and its position in the concluding remarks of the report certainly indicates its importance to the Select Committee.¹⁴⁸ However, these are not ideas that are stated explicitly anywhere in the evidence given to the committee and it is important to consider why they appear so suddenly in its conclusion and where

¹⁴⁷ Select Committee, 1816, 15.

¹⁴⁸ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 19.

they have come from. The ideas echo Winckelmann's theories that the quality of ancient Greece's art was a result of its political freedom allowing individuals to excel.¹⁴⁹ It is important to note that this association between Greek freedom and Greek art was not unique to Winckelmann: he drew heavily on ancient sources in formulating and expressing these ideas, and similar ideas can also be found in the work of a number of writers working before Winckelmann, including Shaftesbury and Turnbull.¹⁵⁰ But it is certainly the case that attitudes to ancient sculpture were heavily influenced by Winckelmann's theories about art at the time of the Elgin acquisition.¹⁵¹ The idea that the quality of art was linked to the political circumstances in which it was made was an important one in art theory in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although the precise political conditions deemed necessary for good art varied. It was just as possible to argue that individual liberty was detrimental to the quality of art and the best work was produced under absolute monarchies. Individuals' views on the causes of good quality art in the past and the scope for similar art to be produced in the present were heavily dependent on their political views.¹⁵²

The link between liberty and good art was so well established in nineteenth-century Hellenism that the committee seems not to have had any problems producing such an argument at the last minute, as if self-evident and incontrovertible. But the way in which they formulate these arguments allows us to see the relationship between art and politics that they envisaged. This is not a straight adoption of Winckelmann's vision, which was less tied to nationalistic concerns and more ambiguous about whether classical perfection

¹⁴⁹ Winckelmann, *History of the art of antiquity*, 187.

¹⁵⁰ Harloe, "Pausanias as Historian in Winckelmann's History."

¹⁵¹ Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 19.

¹⁵² A.D. Potts, "Political Attitudes and the Rise of Historicism in Art Theory," 200–204.

could be achieved in the modern world. In the Select Committee's model, free nations not only produced better art but were also better able to appreciate other nations' art. The report also implied that the relationship between art and society could work the other way: owning great art could not only improve artistic taste but also society as a whole. This association of ownership of heritage with political superiority is nothing new. Classical sculpture had been part of the trappings of power since the Renaissance, and we have seen how important it still was in the political manoeuvrings of nation states at this time.

While there was nothing remarkable about identifying with classical models, the model chosen and the distinctive ways in which it was used enabled the British to position themselves within this rivalry and define British identity.¹⁵³ The decision to identify with the Greeks seems obvious, given that these were Greek works of art. But it was not the only option. We have seen how Napoleon had also thought he was collecting the best art of Greece by removing ancient sculpture from Italy, but chose to identify with Rome.¹⁵⁴ Collecting Greek art was as much associated with Rome as ancient Greece. The French were seen as major rivals for the Elgin collection and the British could easily have chosen a similar approach; beating the French at their own game.¹⁵⁵ Instead, they took care to construct themselves against this model as a free nation, more deserving of the treasures of antiquity.¹⁵⁶

Demonstrating the legitimacy of the acquisition was particularly important because there were serious questions about whether Elgin had the right to remove sculpture and the repatriation of Napoleon's looted treasures was fresh

¹⁵³ Hoock, "The British State and the Anglo-French Wars over Antiquities"; Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity."

¹⁵⁴ Mainardi, "Assuring the Empire of the Future."

¹⁵⁵ Select Committee, 1816. Evidence of Earl of Aberdeen, 49.

¹⁵⁶ Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," 33-39.

in everyone's minds.¹⁵⁷ The British had both been involved in the repatriation and sought to gain some treasures for themselves through it. It was only when it became clear that they would not get anything that the Elgin acquisition took place.¹⁵⁸ Collecting was constructed as part of Napoleon's tyranny, and repatriation played a prominent role in his defeat, but antiquities remained an important asset in national rivalries. If anything, the return demonstrated the importance of these objects, and heightened the demand for them. As Elgin himself put it:

the fate of that gallery, and the influence of the dispersion of it, have eminently exemplified in the face of Europe, the importance of collections of this nature in a national point of view.¹⁵⁹

Considering the campaigns for the restitution of the marbles today, this seems a very odd argument for their acquisition. But it seems that Elgin thought of the marbles' coming to London as being more like the return of antiquities from the Louvre, rather than the original act of looting. By constructing themselves as a fit home for Greek art and politics, Britain could claim superiority to Napoleon while still engaging in the same nationalistic use of antiquities.¹⁶⁰

The idealisation of the art of Periclean Athens as the apex of artistic achievement in the ancient world and something to be emulated in the present made the Elgin Marbles particularly valuable in these rivalries. But these values are not simply the products of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century connoisseurship. They are drawn from ancient ideas. A particularly important source for ideas about freedom in ancient Athens is the funeral oration

¹⁵⁷ Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Mainardi, "Assuring the Empire of the Future," 160.

¹⁵⁹ Select Committee, 1816. Appendix 2, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," 33-39.

delivered by Pericles in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian war.¹⁶¹ The sentiment in the report that "free governments afford a soil most suitable to the production of native talent, to the maturing of the powers of the human mind, and to the growth of every species of excellence, by opening to merit the prospect of reward and distinction,"¹⁶² clearly evokes the oration's description of what is meant by equality under democracy:

As regards the value set on them, it is as each man is in any way distinguished that he is preferred to public honours, not because he belongs to a particular class, but because of personal merits; nor again, on the ground of poverty is a man barred from a public career by obscurity of rank if he has it in him to do the state a service.¹⁶³

Both expand on this idea of allowing talent to flourish in order to describe freedom as the root of everything that made Athens great. While the link between freedom and cultural achievement was an important feature of nineteenth-century discourse on art, it is important to note that the funeral oration is not a speech about art. It is mainly concerned with memorialising individuals who died in battle through a celebration of the city state they died for. There are no explicit mentions of art and monuments, although this may be hinted at in the idea of the Athenians' love of beauty.¹⁶⁴

The Select Committee report picks up the funeral oration as a ready-made ideal in which the greatness of Athenian culture springs from its political system. This fits with the committee's interest in the marbles as a symbol of Athenian

¹⁶¹ Peter Phillip Liddel, *Civic Obligation and Individual Liberty in Ancient Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁶² Select Committee, 1816, 15.

¹⁶³ Thucydides, 2.37.1 (Loeb trans.).

¹⁶⁴ Thucydides, 2.40.1; A.W. Gomme, *An Historical Commentary on Thucydides* Vol II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 120.

culture as a whole that is at the heart of the arguments for buying the collection. It also allowed them to present themselves as the heirs to the Athens that Pericles addresses and describes in this speech. It is tempting to see this as the “history” whose lessons the report references.¹⁶⁵ But Thucydides is not mentioned explicitly. It is possible that, unlike the rather more technical art-historical sources, this history was considered as known to everyone (whether through Thucydides or secondary sources) and that it was read more as a straightforward account of what had happened, needing no attribution. Certainly, it was one of the most widely studied sources on ancient history at this time and was becoming a standard set text in schools.¹⁶⁶

As well as allowing the committee to explore and emulate the Athenians’ own political ideals, the funeral oration also allows them to explore the idea of their legacy. It is a source in which the man who commissioned the Parthenon talks about how his city will be remembered:

Many are the proofs which we have given of our power and assuredly it does not lack witnesses, and therefore we shall be the wonder not only of the men of to-day but of after times; we shall need no Homer to sing our praise nor any other poet whose verses may perhaps delight for the moment but whose presentation of the facts will be discredited by the truth. Nay, we have compelled every sea and every land to grant access to our daring, and have everywhere planted everlasting memorials both of evil to foes and of good to friends.¹⁶⁷

This passage refers to Athens’ overseas territories, which did not last. In his commentary on Thucydides, Gomme refers to this as a “singular error,”

¹⁶⁵ Select Committee, 1816, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Martin Lowther Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain, 1500-1900*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 76, 102.

¹⁶⁷ Thucydides, 2.41.4, (Loeb trans.).

commenting that this memorial is actually to be found in literature, art, thought and politics.¹⁶⁸ He is not the only one to use this hindsight to re-read this passage, several translations hint at this by translating “σημείων” as monuments.¹⁶⁹ It was hard to think about the Elgin Marbles without thinking about the funeral oration in a nineteenth-century context primed by the Winckelmann’s links between politics and art, the growing public role of the museum and a broad idealisation of ancient Greece. But the presence of sculpture from the Parthenon in London and in the canon of great art has also made it hard to read the funeral oration without thinking about the Elgin marbles. This is an enduring tradition - Gomme’s commentary describes the Parthenon frieze as a great work brought to mind by Pericles’ words in the funeral oration. He in turn quotes Beazley on the frieze as a “perfect illustration of the ideal of democracy which is expressed in the funeral speech of Pericles.”¹⁷⁰ This closed loop of echoes which had come to seem a natural response to the two works owes much to the political presentation of the Elgin marbles at the time of their acquisition.

The tendency to see the marbles as a representation of Athens as a social, political and creative whole was an important reason for their acquisition. Echoing the funeral oration was part of this strategy. But these echoes were filtered through the material that survived and was valued in the nineteenth century. This meant not only emphasising art as a major feature of ancient Athens, but also implying that art somehow caused its wider greatness:

Your committee cannot dismiss this interesting subject, without submitting to the attentive reflection of the House, how highly the

¹⁶⁸ A.W. Gomme, *An Historical Commentary on Thucydides* Vol II , 130.

¹⁶⁹ M. I Finley trans. with Rex and Warner, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London Penguin, 1972), 148; B. Jowett *Thucydides Translated into English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1881), 120.

¹⁷⁰ A.W. Gomme, *An Historical Commentary on Thucydides* Vol II , 126.

cultivation of the Fine Arts has contributed to the reputation, character, and dignity of every Government by which they have been encouraged, and how intimately they are connected with the advancement of every thing valuable in science, literature and philosophy.

In contemplating the importance and splendor to which so small a republic as Athens rose, by the genius and energy of her citizens, exerted in the path of such studies it is impossible to overlook how transient the memory and fame of extended empires and of mighty conquerors are, in comparison of those who have rendered inconsiderable states eminent and immortalized their own names by these pursuits.¹⁷¹

The apparent self-consciousness about Athens' legacy in the funeral oration fitted well with the preoccupations of people living in the nineteenth century with their own place in history.¹⁷² It allowed them to frame the question of whether to buy the Elgin Marbles as a dilemma over what sort of empire Britain would be remembered as. Failure to value and purchase the Elgin Marbles would (it was implied) make Britain the wrong sort of empire, no better than the Ottomans who had (reportedly) used them for target practice or the ancient Persians who destroyed the first incarnation of the Parthenon.¹⁷³ Buying the Elgin Marbles offered an opportunity to demonstrate that Britain not only wielded power, but had the values necessary to make a lasting cultural contribution - just like the Athenians before them. For all the apparent confidence of the Select Committee's identification with ancient Athens, there is

¹⁷¹ Select Committee, 1816, 15.

¹⁷² Richard Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 52-59.

¹⁷³ Select Committee, 1816, 5; Rachel Kousser, "Destruction and Memory on the Athenian Acropolis" *Art Bulletin* XCI, 3 (September 2009): 263-282.

a sense here of crisis and a fear of not living up to the country's ideals. These anxieties and the positive role envisaged for the marbles in improving Britain will be discussed in more detail in the later sections of this chapter.

This argument is particularly intriguing because, while it draws heavily on ideas laid down by Thucydides, it appears to reverse his position. Where the funeral oration describes power as more important than the words of Homer, the Select Committee emphasises literature over military might. Thucydides also deals explicitly with Athens' monumental legacy elsewhere in his history but, given the content of this discussion, it is unsurprising that the Select Committee does not refer to it:

Suppose, for example, that the city of Sparta were to become deserted and that only the temples and foundations of buildings remained, I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be. Yet the Spartans occupy two fifths of the Peloponnese and stand at the head not only of the whole Peloponnese itself but also of numerous allies beyond its frontiers. Since, however, the city is not regularly planned and contains no temples or monuments of great magnificence, but is simply a collection of villages, in the ancient Hellenic way, its appearance would not come up to expectation. If, on the other hand, the same thing were to happen to Athens, one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is.¹⁷⁴

By describing how the ruins of Athens could cause future generations to overestimate its power, this passage challenges the idea that monuments are a clear indication of a society's power and shows that ruins can mislead us about

¹⁷⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.10 trans. Warner, R. (Penguin, 1972), 41.

the past.¹⁷⁵ This poses a serious threat to the Select Committee's use of the Elgin Marbles as a demonstration of the superiority of Athenian society and challenges their desire to emulate it. As we shall see, the question of whether ancient Athens was a suitable role model for Britain came to be an important area of debate after the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles.

There is much about the conclusions of the Select Committee report that seems anachronistic. It uses texts more to fit with contemporary preoccupations than to preserve historical accuracy. But it is important to remember that the question of the relationship between changes in Greek art and changes in historical and political circumstances is still an active one. The idea that there is something particularly political about the decoration of the Parthenon endures in the extensive literature on the subject.¹⁷⁶ Elsner has most recently made the case for a relationship between changes in political participation and changes in the interaction between audience and art form.¹⁷⁷ The shift he describes from direct interaction with art, to imaginative engagement with another world shown in the art work echoes changes in viewing and engagement in Athens' civic institutions. This argument is not unproblematic since, as Stewart points out, the artistic shifts he describes took place in non-democratic parts of Greece as well.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps what distinguishes both Elsner and Stewart from the writers of the 1816 report is that both recognise that, whatever their specific relationship, the changes in art and society are historically situated shifts, not

¹⁷⁵ Karen Bassi, "Things of the Past: Objects and Time in Greek Narrative." *Arethusa*, 38, 1, (2005): 1-32.

¹⁷⁶ e.g. J.J. Pollitt, "The meaning of the Parthenon Frieze," in *The Interpretation of Architectural Sculpture in Greece and Rome*, ed. D. Buitron-Oliver (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 51-63.

¹⁷⁷ Jaś Elsner, "Reflections on the 'Greek Revolution' in Art: from Changes in Viewing to the Transformation of Subjectivity," in *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece*, 68-95.

¹⁷⁸ A.F. Stewart, *Classical Greece and the Birth of Western Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 52-75.

hard and fast rules of what makes good or bad art, and there is nothing ennobling about good art. As Elsner puts it:

although the great artistic changes of the 'Greek Revolution' cannot be separated from Athenian democracy, in principle the subjectivities they generated were not necessarily democratic ones and were perfectly serviceable (even useful) in other kinds of political systems, as we have seen in the twentieth century when forms of realism were the chosen language of the totalitarian systems from Russia to Germany.¹⁷⁹

This usefulness is certainly clear in the way the Select Committee talks about the Elgin Marbles. This raises questions about how closely the political system in Britain in 1816 resembled the Athenian democracy it was celebrating, and what ideological purposes the marbles served.

¹⁷⁹ Jaś Elsner, "Reflections on the 'Greek Revolution,'" 94.

“Political discussion embodied in a Greek History”

We have seen how the politics of ancient Athens played an important part of the rationale for idealising its art. Yet it was not only art theorists who were interested in Athenian democracy. The question of freedom in ancient Athens was a major focus for historical debate in the nineteenth century. Like the debates over the Elgin Marbles, more was at stake in this history than just an understanding of the past: Momigliano described it as “political discussion embodied in a Greek history.”¹⁸⁰ As relics of ancient Athens, bought by government for a public institution and justified by an explicitly political argument that drew parallels between past and present, the Elgin Marbles are inextricably linked to these debates.

In the years after the acquisition of the Elgin collection, Greek political history became a subject for heated debate, not only about what had happened in the past, but also about which ancient system was an appropriate model to emulate. Perhaps the most striking thing about the rhetoric of the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles was that it idealised Athens’ political freedom at a time when historians were framing Athenian democracy as a dangerous political regime and idealising the rule of monarchs. So, for example, Mitford describes great men flourishing in Athens despite “a defective constitution, and law and justice ill assured”.¹⁸¹ Mitford had plenty of ancient texts to draw on for such criticism, including such influential writers as Thucydides and Plato.¹⁸² But this dislike of Athenian democracy was also informed by contemporary events: Mitford’s

¹⁸⁰ Arnaldo Momigliano, *George Grote and the Study of Greek History* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1952).

¹⁸¹ W. Mitford, *The History of Greece* vol. 2 (London: T.Cadell and W.Davies, 1814), 362.

¹⁸² Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, 62; K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: The spell of Plato* (London: Routledge, 2003).

dislike of Athenian democracy became clearer in the parts of his work written after the French Revolution.¹⁸³

However, there were others for whom the political freedoms of Greece made it an ideal that could be compared with the present.¹⁸⁴ The liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill famously described Marathon as a more important battle for English history than Hastings and returned repeatedly to the example of democratic Athens in *On Liberty*.¹⁸⁵ The tendency to idealise Greece in other spheres made Athenian democracy an important justification for those campaigning for political reform. But to make use of Athens as a model for the present, historians of Greece had to justify themselves in response to the ancient and modern critics of democracy.¹⁸⁶ This justification came in the form of two major histories by Thirlwall (published 1835-44) and Grote (published 1846-56).¹⁸⁷ Grote's first two ventures into history writing were in defence of Athenian democracy.¹⁸⁸ The writings of Grote and Mill make clear that their responses were a long time coming. Writing a complete Greek history was a

¹⁸³ George Grote, "Art 1 - Fasti Hellenici," *The Westminster Review* 5 (1826), 286.

¹⁸⁴ Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, 14.

¹⁸⁵ John Stuart Mill, "Grote's History of Greece I," in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XI - *Essays on Philosophy and the Classics*, ed. John M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/248/21770>; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 5, 63.

¹⁸⁶ T.H. Irwin, "Mill and the Classical World," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* ed. John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 427.

¹⁸⁷ J. W. Clark 'Thirlwall, (Newell) Connop (1797-1875)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27185>.

¹⁸⁸ George Grote, "Of the Athenian Government," in *George Grote Reconsidered: a 200th Birthday Celebration with a First Edition of his Essay "Of the Athenian Government"* ed. William Musgrave Calder and Stephen Trzaskoma (Weidmann, 1996), 82-94.

considerable task, and it is unsurprising that it took Grote so long, especially given his business and political obligations.¹⁸⁹

The conclusion of the Select Committee report on the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles prefigures all this. It happened two years before the last volume of Mitford's history came out and thirty years before even the first volume of Grote's history appeared.¹⁹⁰ The Elgin acquisition was the result of an idealisation of ancient Greece which was politically conservative (although not necessarily conservative in other senses) with particular emphasis on architecture of the Greek revival and the influence of the Society of Dilettanti.¹⁹¹ This continuing influence is clear in the number of Dilettanti called to give evidence at the Elgin committee hearings, including William Hamilton, Thomas Lawrence, Richard Payne Knight, William Wilkins, The Earl of Aberdeen, John Bacon Sawrey Morritt and Benjamin West.¹⁹² The debate over the Elgin Marbles gives a glimpse of a type of Hellenism in which the aesthetic appeal of ancient Athens is explicitly linked with those aspects of Athenian politics which were admired and emulated by nineteenth-century Britain. Freedom is the main value celebrated, and this is a notoriously ambiguous concept.¹⁹³ The Select Committee seems much more interested in free markets than individual voting

¹⁸⁹ George Grote, *A History of Greece: from the Time of Solon to 403 B.C.* ed. J.M. Mitchell and P. Cartledge (London: Routledge, 2001), xxii-xxiii.

¹⁹⁰ W. W. Wroth, 'Mitford, William (1744–1827)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18860>; Paul Cartledge "Introduction" in George Grote, *A History of Greece: from the Time of Solon to 403 B.C.* ed. J.M. Mitchell and P. Cartledge (London: Routledge, 2001), ix.

¹⁹¹ Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, 1-5.

¹⁹² Jason M. Kelly, "Society of Dilettanti (act. 1732–2003)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/92790>.

¹⁹³ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 121.

rights.¹⁹⁴ This allowed the Select Committee to stress the importance of Pericles, not the Athenian people, and to see strong leadership as the reason for the Parthenon and Athens' other achievements.

The acquisition of the Elgin Marbles happened at the perfect time to play into contemporary interest in ancient Greece and to stimulate debate about whether Athenian democracy was a suitable role model for modern Britain. The way that the rationale for the acquisition depended heavily on parallels between contemporary English society and democratic Athens seems to anticipate the work of radical historians like Grote. But it is important to note that Britain in 1816 was hardly the sort of representative democracy the ancient Greeks would recognise or that Grote wanted. The acquisition happened under a Tory government and there is no evidence that the talk of freedom was at all politically contentious.¹⁹⁵

The Select Committee's interest in Athenian political freedom was more about conventional art history than direct emulation of its political structures. Nevertheless, it did link Athens' artistic achievements with the quality of its government and then identify Britain with this system for nationalistic purposes.¹⁹⁶ As a result, histories that presented Athenian government as corrupt sat ill with the idealisation of Athens' cultural productions. This made the Elgin marbles valuable territory for radical historians, allowing them to modify and claim as their own something that had already been used by the establishment in expressing British identity and power. Grote's history draws on both Thucydides and Plutarch in its description of the Periclean building

¹⁹⁴ Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," 33-39.

¹⁹⁵ A Mitchell, *The Whigs in Opposition 1815-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

¹⁹⁶ Challis, "The Parthenon Sculptures: Emblems of British National Identity," 33-39.

programme.¹⁹⁷ But it shifts credit away from Pericles and towards democracy itself:

It is not of course to Perikles that the renown of these splendid productions of art belongs but the great sculptors and architects by whom they were conceived and executed belonged to that same period of expanding and stimulating Athenian democracy which called forth a similar creative genius in oratory in dramatic poetry and in philosophical speculation ... Considering these prodigious achievements in the field of art only as they bear upon Athenian and Grecian history they are phenomena of extraordinary importance¹⁹⁸

In pointedly passing over the contemporary significance of these works of art, Grote made clear the enduring effects of Athenian democracy. The Elgin Marbles represent a prize in the contest over which political tradition could lay claim to ancient Athens and whose version of freedom fitted with its ideal. By claiming them as an achievement of the democratic citizens, Grote could see them as artistic vindication of his political ideas. While this required a shift from the Select Committee's emphasis on Pericles as a strong leader, it built on an idea of the Elgin Marbles as political art, rooted in the Select Committee report.

While the ideal of ancient Athens was widely accepted, the vision of society that was being idealised varied considerably. The apparent consensus over the beauty and political symbolism of the Elgin Marbles concealed debates made all the more fierce by their apparent unchanging representation of a true image of Athens. The question of how much nineteenth-century Britain had in common with ancient Athens also raised doubts over the quality of British art in

¹⁹⁷ Grote, *A History of Greece*, 422-4.

¹⁹⁸ Grote, G. *A History of Greece*, 426.

comparison with the Elgin Marbles and questions of how the working man can benefit from their acquisition.

“It was money spent for the use of the people”

The rhetoric around the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles is often framed as nationalistic self-aggrandisement. Assertions like “no country can be better adapted than our own to afford an honourable asylum to these monuments of the school of Phidias” certainly offer evidence of this. However, for all this arrogance, the conclusion of the Select Committee report also hints at anxiety over its awareness that British artistic productions do not measure up to these works:

they may receive that admiration and homage to which they are entitled, and serve in return as models and examples to those, who by knowing how to revere and appreciate them, may learn first to imitate, and ultimately to rival them.¹⁹⁹

This responds to a long-standing sense of the inferiority of British art, which stretches back at least as far as Winckelmann’s description of the British imagination as unsuitable for painting.²⁰⁰

The same historical consciousness involved in reflecting on, appropriating and collecting the past, also invites reflection on what one’s own legacy will be. If art was a reflection of wider society (as the Select Committee argued) anxieties about the quality of British art could have much wider implications. Britain risked the sort of oblivion or scorn that it gave to less idealised ancient civilisations. By holding ancient Greece in such high esteem, nineteenth-century Britain risked never living up to Greece’s achievements. It raised anxieties about how history would judge Britain, even by the nation’s own values.

This anxiety about the quality of the country’s artistic productions (along with other anxieties about the education and conduct of the people) played a critical

¹⁹⁹ Select Committee, 1816, 15.

²⁰⁰ Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, 122.

role in shaping museums as public institutions in the nineteenth century.²⁰¹ The museum offered a way of transmitting values across time. The hope that (like Pericles' building programme) ownership of the Elgin Marbles would involve and improve all classes of society is clear in the conclusion of the Select Committee report. The commons debate extended this reasoning in a telling way by likening the stimulus the Elgin marbles offered to the very real economic stimulus of building the Parthenon in the first place. The secretary to the Admiralty, John Croker, described a confrontation between Pericles and his political opponents over the building programme that included the Parthenon:

It was singular that when 2,500 years ago, Pericles was adorning Athens with those very works, some of which we are now about to acquire, the same cry of economy was raised against him, and the same answer that he then gave might be repeated now, that it was money spent for the use of the people, for the encouragement of arts, the increase of manufactures, the prosperity of trades, and the encouragement of industry; not merely to please the eye of the man of taste, but to create, to stimulate, to guide the exertions of the artist, the mechanic, and even the labourer, and to spread through all the branches of society a spirit of improvement, and the means of a sober and industrious affluence. But he would go to the length of saying that the possession of these precious remains of ancient genius and taste would conduce not only to the perfection of the arts, but to the elevation of our national character, to our opulence, to our substantial greatness.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Siegel, "The Public in the Museum" in *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 79.

²⁰² Mr Croker, speaking in "House of Commons: Parliamentary Debate on Purchasing the Elgin Marbles," Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 55.

This closely paraphrased Plutarch's account of the criticisms of the building project, in which Pericles' enemies objected to spending public money, gathered for war, on a showy building project and Pericles responded:

the city, when once she is sufficiently equipped with all that is necessary for prosecuting the war, should apply her abundance to such works as, by their completion, will bring her everlasting glory, and while in process of completion will bring that abundance into actual service, in that all sorts of activity and diversified demands arise, which rouse every art and stir every hand, and bring, as it were, the whole city under pay, so that she not only adorns, but supports herself as well from her own resources.²⁰³

While the parallels with the ancient source are close, this is much more than neutral historical background. As in the Select Committee report, Croker likened the ancient creation of these sculptures to their modern acquisition. But he also went one step further to claim Pericles' posthumous support for the acquisition. Croker was a politician with a strong interest in history and a clear familiarity with the ancient sources.²⁰⁴ His own historical work was not without political investment: his study of the French Revolution aimed to discredit any political movements inspired by it. His decision to identify his own government with Pericles, and their opponents with his enemies must have been as important as the broader desire to identify Britain with Athens.

The idea that the acquisition was a way to emulate not only the style of Athenian art, but also its specific use for public benefit was critical to the subsequent reception of the marbles. It picked up on the theoretical links

²⁰³ Plut. *Vit. Per.*, 13.159.4 (Loeb trans.).

²⁰⁴ William Thomas, "Croker, John Wilson (1780–1857)" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6738>.

between Athenian art and society we have seen elsewhere and suggests a positive role for ancient art in the present. The Tory government who acquired the Elgin Marbles saw them as a means of public improvement. But radicals were also interested in their potential for public education, especially for making the classical world accessible to the working classes. The historian Thirlwall, in an address to the Royal Institution of South Wales in 1866, raised the possibility that museums offered a particularly rich way of understanding ancient culture for those who did not understand Latin or Greek:

I before observed that, even without a knowledge of mathematics, it is possible to acquire a very valuable stock of useful information in physics, so it is possible for one who knows neither Greek nor Latin to gain much profitable knowledge of Greek and Roman antiquity. I have no doubt that a person, in that sense illiterate, but endowed with the requisite natural attitude and capacity, who should study the ancient monuments preserved in the British Museum, with no other aid than he may find in English writers, might form a livelier and truer image of the ancient world, in some of its most interesting aspects, than ever dawned on many a scholar who spent his whole life among the Greek and Latin authors.²⁰⁵

Thirlwall was reacting against the privileged position of ancient authors as a way of accessing the past. This makes sense as part of an argument against the dominance of Greek and Latin in education at the expense of other studies. But it is also an interesting perspective on how visitors were supposed to approach museum objects. To Thirlwall, objects were more lively and direct than ancient texts, but could not be understood without supporting information.

²⁰⁵ Connop Thirlwall, *Essays, Speeches and Sermons* (London: Bentley and Son, 1880), 304-5.

There was a growing body of such supporting information throughout the nineteenth century which shows the value placed on widening access. The popular press drew heavily on the British Museum as a resource in its work to make a greater proportion of society comfortable with high culture.²⁰⁶ One major source of guides to the British Museum was the whiggish publisher *The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*. This society was closely linked with some of the major defenders of Athenian democracy we have encountered: one of its founders was James Mill, father to John Stuart Mill and a major influence on George Grote.²⁰⁷ In keeping with the widespread interest in Elgin collection's potential for public education, this group published a *Guide to the Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles* in 1833.

This guide referred to itself as a popular work, but actually offers a rather detailed examination of the marbles. It covered a wide range of topics including Athenian topography, history, architecture, religion and the history of sculpture.²⁰⁸ The guide urged close study of original texts and drew heavily upon them for its own background information.²⁰⁹ It also engaged with academic debates - often not in a particularly balanced way. One gloriously dismissive footnote reads: "all further discussion... must be considered useless by any competent Greek critic. Brondsted's reading is the only one that is correct, and the only one that any scholar would think of giving."²¹⁰ Although the tone is patronising in places, it does seem to assume quite a high level of

²⁰⁶ Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 38.

²⁰⁷ Terence Ball, 'Mill, James (1773–1836)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18709>; Joseph Hamburger, 'Grote, George (1794–1871)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11677>.

²⁰⁸ *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 1 (London: Charles Knight, 1833), 38

²⁰⁹ *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 1, 60.

²¹⁰ *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 1, 53.

background knowledge and it may not have been very useful to those completely new to the subject.

As well as aiming to give a comprehensive background to the material to a wider audience, the guide also responded directly to the question of public improvement through the presence of the marbles in the British Museum. It saw them as having two major roles:

first, as mere specimens of sculpture; and secondly, as forming part of the history of a people.

Unlike the Select Committee report, the guide elevated the historical importance of the Elgin marbles above that of art. This meant that it was not enough to simply look at the marbles without knowing their historical background. As a result, ancient texts were crucial to this approach. The guide also drew numerous parallels between ancient art and ancient literature, with both seen as better models for the present than more recent productions. Ancient texts were described as the common thread that unites antiquarian and aesthetic study of the sculptures:

Though the artist and the student may examine the sculptures of the Parthenon with somewhat different views, their studies are more allied than is generally supposed. The artist who looks at them merely as delineations of form, without reference to the ideas that gave them their existence, loses half the pleasure and the profit; and the student who merely names and catalogues them, without connecting them with the written monuments of Grecian genius, that is with the illustration of ancient texts, is also pursuing a barren study²¹¹

²¹¹ *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 2, 217-18.

This is an argument for a holistic approach to the sculpture, at least in part because of the familiar idea that art is intimately linked with the rest of society, with literature given a prominent role. In the guide, art and literature are viewed as analogous: it says that boys should be taught to read ancient authors as if reading a piece of the Parthenon and describes Homer as a “monument.” Despite these analogies, art and literature were clearly not seen as equivalent. Images were described as a “living comment” on texts and their main role in the guide’s model of education was as illustrations to enliven the teaching of texts.²¹² This tendency to see images as more direct, but less informative reflects a long tradition of elevating of texts over images as sources of information.²¹³

However, the guide was keen to stress that information is not the main reason to study the Greeks:

The scientific knowledge of the Greeks cannot *now* direct our inquiries into the phenomena of nature, nor can they be referred to as our masters without appeal in the investigation of moral and political truth. What are they then? They are our models in taste;- they are our examples in the expression of thought;- but they are not, and ought not to be, the guides of our opinions.²¹⁴

This seems to soften the tendency to draw the Elgin marbles into political debates and revert to the purely aesthetic response advocated by many who gave evidence to the Select Committee. This denial of ancient Greece as a source of political truth goes against the grain of many of the responses to the Elgin marbles we have seen, whether the nebulous imitation of freedom by the Select

²¹² *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 2, 215, 224.

²¹³ Squire, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*.

²¹⁴ *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles*, vol. 2, 219.

Committee or the more specific adoption of political structures advocated by radicals like Grote.

However, the demotion of ancient Greece to the aesthetic realm is a political move in itself. This argument echoes ideas about education expressed by Thirlwall and Mill. Both argued that training in Greek and Latin not only took up too much of the curriculum, but also was approached in the wrong way, with too much focus on grammar.²¹⁵ Mill, Thirlwall and the guide all stress the continued importance of studying source material from Greece and Rome, but see the benefit of this as studying a simpler culture, with less deep knowledge, but more vivid expression. It is unsurprising that this guide - an attempt at educating a general public about ancient Greece in a new way - would value the reinvention of education (by demoting the classics) over the use of Athens as a radical political model. But it also shows the cognitive dissonance at the heart of receptions of ancient Greece - it was at the heart of establishment values but was also a potent way to challenge them.

We have seen how the Select Committee's preoccupation with the Elgin Marbles as an aesthetic ideal became absorbed into their later reception as illustrations of a broader socio-political ideal. The tendency to idealise and emulate ancient Athens in the debates surrounding the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles both depends on and obscures the sources on Athens at this time. It enabled those purchasing the marbles to buy into a particular vision of Athenian identity which saw art as deeply embedded in society, but it also obscured some of the problems resulting from emulating that society. Ancient texts offered a way to understand sculpture from the Parthenon, but they could also be used to construct it as a perfect match for the nineteenth century museum project - improving the public at the same time as it demonstrated

²¹⁵ Thirlwall, *Essays, Speeches and Sermons*, 304-5; Mill, "Inaugural Address delivered to the University of St. Andrews, Feb 1st, 1867," *The Living Age* 92, 1189, 643-671.

national superiority. The Elgin Marbles are widely acknowledged to have played a pivotal role in the history of taste, but they also pioneered a new relationship between artwork, nation and audience.

Narratives around the Elgin marbles have shifted since the nineteenth century, but they remain the focus of debate. The director of the British Museum recently said:

A whole nation has decided they embody something fundamental about ... national identity. It is a prime example of seeing what you want to see.²¹⁶

This statement could almost be about the conclusion of the Select Committee report but, of course, my ellipsis above took out one word: “Greek.” If the Greeks are not the first to use the Elgin marbles in identity politics, this raises the question: is there something fundamentally political or nationalistic about the Parthenon and the sculpture Elgin removed from it? If there is, it is something felt in the modern world at least as much because of the ancient texts that we use to construct our ideas of Periclean Athens as the marbles themselves. Furthermore, it cannot happen independently of previous generations’ readings of those texts into those stones. The debates over the acquisition of the Elgin marbles are an important moment in the association of Greek art with freedom; a theme that we will revisit in chapter 5.

This chapter has shown how modern political readings are more complex than simply “seeing what you want to see” in a suitable ancient object. The nineteenth-century political readings of the Elgin marbles drew heavily on ancient narratives about Pericles, the Parthenon and their broader context. These in turn were read in ways that fit the preoccupations of their context -

²¹⁶ Charlotte Higgins, “British Museum’s Neil MacGregor on the Parthenon Marbles and Cyrus Cylinder” *The Guardian*, February 2, 2010, accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/feb/02/neil-macgregor-london-review-books>.

resulting in not one, but many political readings. These readings in which art was closely bound to public life were a perfect match for the modern public museum with its beliefs in public improvement and national celebration. We cannot ignore this combination of ancient text, ancient object and modern institution in answering questions of their place in contemporary discourse.

3. Myth in the museum

The role of myth as an organising rationale in museums is largely forgotten today, but at one point was ubiquitous. Vast numbers of objects that depict mythological themes survive from the ancient world, and myth can offer a tempting explanation for many more. As a result, myth has been an important feature of interpretative strategies in museums, from the long tradition of thematic displays of sculpture through to displays of prehistory that claimed to have found the truth behind the myth. The nineteenth century saw the growth of the disciplines (such as folklore and anthropology) that have defined the modern understanding of myth.²¹⁷ This chapter explores myth's changing relationship with archaeology from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century as these two disciplines with common roots in antiquarianism struggled to define themselves. Museums proved an important site for exploring the possible interactions between the traditional stories of the ancient world and its physical remains. We will see how they explored a number of possible approaches to myth before eventually sidelining it.

The modern notion of myth is distinct from the ancient meanings of *mythos*: a word that could encompass a variety of forms of narrative and discourse.²¹⁸ While it is true that the ancient Greeks had their own theories on traditional stories, modern notions of the category of mythology inevitably have their roots in scholarship on ancient stories. Kirk and Burkert's definition of "a traditional narrative of collective significance" fits the stories discussed in this chapter, but

²¹⁷ Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 10-14; Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius J. Holtorf, "'As Long as I've Ever Known It...': On Folklore and Archaeology," in *Archaeology and Folklore*, ed. Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius J. Holtorf (London: Routledge, 1999), 3-25.

²¹⁸ Marcel Detienne, "Mythology" trans. Jeannine Routier Pucci and Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Anthony Grafton et al. (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 615-617.

it is a somewhat limited definition.²¹⁹ That “collective significance” plays down much of the real function of myth - both its ideological significance in the ancient world and their symbolic function in modern readings. Modern discussions of myth are particularly interested in its truth content, from the common use of the word as a synonym for “untrue” to scholarly debate over how much the ancients believed their myths.²²⁰ While myths are rarely taken literally, there has been a paradoxical modern desire to make them tell us truths about the ancient world or humanity in general. Myth has tended to be treated either as surviving stories from a very distant past, or as an allegory, useful for understanding less concrete truths.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, myth was largely abandoned as a historical source for understanding the distant past. For example, Grote thought there was no reliable evidence for events before the first Olympiad and described myth as “neither trustworthy nor captivating when we sever it from...subjective conditions and expose its naked elements to the scrutiny of an objective criticism.”²²¹ But some scholars were not willing to give up on the possibility of getting useful information from myth. There were two sides to this continued use of myth: attempts to extract information about the meanings of art and the foundations of Greek culture from stories seen as otherwise untrue and attempts redeem myth as a historical source by finding its roots in real archaeological sites.

This chapter looks at the changing role of myth in museums in the nineteenth century; how objects that depict myth have been understood in museums and the way that myth has served museums’ own agendas. It begins with a brief

²¹⁹ "Myth." in Hubert Cancik et al. ed., *Brill's New Pauly*, English Edition, vol. 9, 443-444.

²²⁰ Robert L. Fowler, “Mythos and Logos,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131 (2011): 45-66.

²²¹ Grote, *History of Greece*, vol. 1, 652-4; Lesley Fitton, *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 42.

overview of the thematic approaches to ancient statuary that were common across European collections for much of their early history. It asks how important the role of mythology was in such approaches and what approach to statuary they encouraged. The next section looks at Charles Newton's work at the British Museum to show that mythology was not abandoned, even by one of the most ardent proponents of the new chronological displays. We will see how Newton used his approach to myth to argue for the integrity of the British Museum's collections in the ongoing debates about the distribution of London's museums and how he applied it in a display of ancient vases at the British Museum. The next section looks at how Jane Harrison used and modified Newton's ideas in her talks given in the British Museum. It explores the relative freedom of talks to move away from the grand narratives of museum display to tell ancient stories and how these stories were seen as an important way into a deeper understanding of Greek art for the general public.

The final two sections look at an alternative role for mythology in museum interpretation that emerged with the growing interest in prehistory at the end of the nineteenth century. It looks at two temporary exhibitions of prehistoric material and the role that myth played in generating interest in this material and shaping the way it was understood. Starting with Schliemann's exhibition of his finds from Hissarlik at South Kensington, we will ask what Schliemann's claims to have found material evidence of the characters and events of Homeric epic meant for the museums that displayed this evidence and how seriously the public took these claims. Finally we will look at Evans' 1903 Knossos exhibition at the Royal Academy and consider what had changed in the relationship between archaeology and myth with the increasing professionalisation of archaeology.

This chapter explores the museum work of several of the biggest names in Greek archaeology; Newton, Harrison, Schliemann and Evans. These were

individuals self-consciously transforming or rebelling against the discipline of classics. While there is a clear thread of influence running between the figures discussed in this chapter, its aim is not to portray a genealogy of the discipline but to understand how the problems and possibilities of ancient stories were addressed during this crucial period in the development of archaeology. For these figures, museums offered a place to develop theories, present field findings and make a name for themselves. Their museum work allows us to look at the role of the museum in relation to disciplinary knowledge and its communication to a wider public. This was an important period in the history of archaeology and nobody knew this better than those involved. In the words of Jane Harrison:

Old men began to see visions, young men to dream dreams. I had just left Cambridge when Schliemann began to dig at Troy... we classical deaf-adders stopped our ears and closed our eyes; but at the mere sound of the magical words "Golden Bough" the scales fell - we heard and understood. Then Arthur Evans set sail for his new Atlantis and telegraphed news of the Minotaur from his own labyrinth; perforce we saw this was a serious matter, it affected the "Homeric Question."²²²

Harrison here is telling a story of the development of her discipline, but it is a narrative of progress towards a less rational approach to the past, in which textual criticism was giving way to new disciplines which offered the possibility of making the stories real. While deeper knowledge of ancient myths is at best a minor part of the gains made by archaeology at this time, those myths are fundamental to the way the discipline imagined its achievements and the way its story continues to be told. This chapter is as much about the myths of archaeology as the archaeology of myths.

²²² Jane Ellen Harrison, "Reminiscences of a Student's Life," *Arion* 4 (2)(1965): 343.

Myth on display

Ancient Greek art has been described as having an “obsession with their gods, heroes and mythological creatures,” and these themes certainly do saturate ancient artistic production.²²³ As a result, any museum with a collection of classical art was inevitably faced with the problems of interpreting myth. The protean nature of these stories, encountered in a range of variations throughout ancient literature and art (not to mention subsequent receptions) makes such interpretation a complex business. This section of the chapter considers what was at stake for museums in claiming that a work of ancient art represents a mythological subject. I will begin by exploring the problems of identifying and naming individual objects as instances of a specific myth, then look at the implications of such identifications for the arrangement of displays of ancient art. There have been a number of treatments of the relationship between image, story and text in the ancient world which deal with some of the factors at stake in identifying a work of art with a particular story.²²⁴ This section looks at what this means in the museum context. It asks how myth has shaped interpretations of individual objects and arrangements of collections. It explores the range of ways that interest in ancient myth has been used by museums to their own ends.

The act of giving a work of art a title has long been central to museum interpretation, allowing museums to classify and differentiate their holdings. Until at least the middle of the nineteenth century, titles were seen as unequivocal designations of the meaning of a work of art, that could place it in

²²³ Jennifer Neils, “Myth and Greek Art: Creating a Visual Language,” in *The Cambridge Introduction to Greek Mythology*, ed. Roger D. Woodward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 286-304.

²²⁴ For example: Jocelyn Penny Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Art and Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Squire, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*; Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

relation to literary texts.²²⁵ The pressure to designate the meaning of ancient art in order to make sense of it was as high as for any other art, but there were a number of features of ancient art that complicated the naming process. Most of it does not come with convenient ancient labels and so identifying subject matter can require a lot of literary and iconographic knowledge. The large number of surviving literary sources was an obvious resource for making sense of ancient art. While many stories are known to us through ancient texts, the objects that represent them are not illustrations of these texts. Their divergences from them show that they exist in a complex relation to text, oral tradition and other imagery.²²⁶ The interpretation of ancient images is further complicated by the fact that ancient artists seem to have left deliberate ambiguities between the everyday world and that of myth²²⁷. Later in the chapter we will see some of these complexities raised as arguments for the importance of ancient art (and hence of museums) as part of a comprehensive understanding of the ancient world. But these issues generally presented problems for labels, catalogues and other discussions of specific works of art.

Given the ambiguities of ancient art and the temptations of literary readings, many works of art have been the subject of debate for centuries and their meanings have changed over this time. For example, a statue group from the Ludovisi collection, long known as the *Paetus and Arria* (better known today as the *Ludovisi Gaul*) has been identified with a wide range of figures from history and myth, many of which did not fit with the visual details of the sculpture.²²⁸ Today they are seen as Roman copies of a group dedicated by Attalos I to

²²⁵ John Welchman, *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2.

²²⁶ Small, *The Parallel Worlds of Art and Text*, 1-7.

²²⁷ Goldhill and Osborne "Introduction" in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, 1-11.

²²⁸ Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 282-4.

commemorate victory over the Gauls, but older interpretations can be hard to escape. In 1851, Charles Newton felt no contradiction calling a statue group "*Paetus and Arria*," even while explaining its modern identification.²²⁹ The old identification had become a conventional title without the power to threaten more recent interpretations, but was still embedded in the way the sculpture was discussed. What people without Newton's expertise made of the group, and others like it, is hard to say.

There is a considerable difference between Arria, the forceful but noble Roman matron, and the defeated foreign enemies of Attalos, not to mention the incest, doomed love or political intrigue of other readings.²³⁰ Thus, choosing a title can radically alter the meaning of a work of art and titles can as much reflect prevailing fashions or desires as what is actually represented. This statue group is representative of a larger scale shift in which statues found in Italy tended to be identified with Greek mythological subjects, rather than subjects from Roman history. This shift can be traced to Winckelmann's scholarship and it reflected his belief in the Greekness (and hence high quality) of the statues he knew and loved.²³¹ Assigning a mythological subject to a work of art could have a profound impact both on the way it was understood in its own right and on its literal and conceptual place in a collection.

The arrangement for Pope Julius II of the Belvedere courtyard is an early and influential example of a display of ancient sculpture crafted around the narrative content of the individual pieces. It has been read as a complex network of allusions to Virgil's Aeneid, designed to associate the Pope with

²²⁹ Charles T. Newton, "Remarks on the Collections of Ancient Art in the Museums of Italy, the Glyptothek at Munich and the British Museum." *Museum of Classical Antiquities* 1, 3 (1851): 215.

²³⁰ Haskell and Penny *Taste and the Antique*, 282-4.

²³¹ Beard and Henderson *Classical Art from Greece to Rome*, 70-71.

Rome's ancient heritage and foretell a golden future.²³² The sculpture in the court was more than the sum of its parts; the interaction of narratives in the arrangement evoked a set of values, expressed power and invited visitors to exercise erudition. Thematic arrangement was maintained and extended in the Vatican as the Belvedere courtyard became part of the Pio Clementino Museum, with statuary divided by subject matter, culminating in images of the gods.²³³ This became the standard arrangement for sculpture across Europe, used in other influential museums such as the Louvre and the Glyptothek.²³⁴

Museums were not the only ones to favour an approach organised by subject matter. Antiquarian publications were often based on a hierarchy of themes. An influential example was Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, which aimed to give a comprehensive picture of ancient life by illustrating ancient objects.²³⁵ Its chapters were structured by theme, beginning with gods (from Jupiter down to minor gods), religion and then a vast range of themes relating to everyday life and funerary practice.²³⁶ This hierarchy of values reflects the importance of religion to Montfaucon's project and world view. But dividing into themes in this way also allowed him to approach objects according to the information they could tell him about the past - grouping together objects with similar information value. This information

²³² Hans Henrik Brummer, "On the Julian Program of the Cortile delle Statue in the Vatican Belvedere," in *Il Cortile delle Statue: Der Statuenhof des Belvedere im Vatikan*, ed. Carlo Pietrangeli et al. (Mainz: von Zabern, 1998), 67-75.

²³³ Helmut Seling, "The Genesis of the Museum," *The Architectural Review*, 14 (1967): 103-114.

²³⁴ Seling, "The Genesis of the Museum"; A. D. Potts, "Die Skulpturenaufstellung in der Glyptothek," in *Glyptothek München, 1830-1980*, ed. K. Vierneisel and G. Leinz (Munich: Glyptothek, 1980), 258-283.

²³⁵ Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 131.

²³⁶ Bernard de Montfaucon, *L'Antiquité Expliquée et Représentée en Figures / Antiquitas Explanatiore et Schematibus Illustrata*, accessed March 8, 2013, <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/montfaucon1722ga>;

value was largely derived from the textual tradition (which was Montfaucon's primary interest) and each object illustrated was given a written explanation.²³⁷ Montfaucon was not the only one to take a thematic approach. Even Winckelmann who, as we have seen, is far better known as the inventor of a chronology of ancient art arranged works by subject matter in *Monumenti Antichi Inediti*.²³⁸ Montfaucon's system for arranging antiquities in his writings also had a direct influence on the arrangement of physical collections of antiquities, especially in Turin and Verona.²³⁹

While there is not space for a full history of thematic arrangement in this chapter, it is worth considering it here because the process of dividing collections into categories required judgements about sculpture based on a knowledge of mythology. It also placed mythology in a hierarchy of other narrative and non-narrative subjects for art. While the thematic arrangements in public museums were less focused on a specific narrative, they were equally dependent on identifications of the sculpture's subject matter. Edmund Oldfield (an assistant in the department of antiquities at the British Museum) described these arrangements in 1860:

To make them the means of illustrating, as far as possible, the religion, the social life, and also the iconography of the ancient Greeks and Romans; that is to say, we divide them first of all mythologically, giving up one apartment to the Olympic deities; another to the other ideal figures of less mythological rank; and then a third to the representations of human life; whilst a fourth apartment is appropriated merely to minor monuments, altars, candelabra and such like objects. We thought

²³⁷ Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past*, 235-7.

²³⁸ Beard and Henderson, *Classical Art: From Greece to Rome*, 70.

²³⁹ Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images*, 162-177,

that would on the whole be a means of furnishing instruction to the archaeological student, which could not be obtained practically in any other way.²⁴⁰

This is a thematic division in which mythology constitutes the first and second orders of material (gods and other idealised figures) then other material is defined as ordinary life by contrast, including representations of humans and practical objects.

This type of arrangement is touched upon in a number of museum histories, but rarely examined in depth.²⁴¹ This is perhaps because it is often seen as a step on the way to chronology: something adopted “for want of a better system.”²⁴² The British Museum in the mid-nineteenth century is an interesting case study for complicating this picture. While chronology was largely adopted across the museum, Oldfield spoke of the impossibility of dating Graeco-Roman sculpture, implying that otherwise it might follow this general arrangement. But he also expressed the idea that this might not be particularly helpful even if it could be achieved:

It is certainly impossible even for the most experienced archaeologist to determine accurately their dates; it was consequently not possible to arrange such a series chronologically, nor perhaps would they be very instructive if they were so arranged. We therefore thought it best to adopt a different principle, but not, I think, less scientific²⁴³.

²⁴⁰ House of Commons, *Report of the Select Committee on the British Museum; Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*. (1860), 136.

²⁴¹ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 58; Seling, “The Genesis of the Museum”; Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement*, 74.

²⁴² Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 136.

²⁴³ H.C., *Select Committee British Museum*, 136.

Oldfield presented thematic arrangement as an alternative strategy of equal scientific value. It had its own interpretative potential - drawing attention to particular features of ancient life, rather than tracing the development of civilisation as a whole. This was particularly useful for Graeco-Roman sculpture because of the way this category spanned cultures and times. There may also have been an element of tradition at work - the collections that had long been arranged thematically contained largely Graeco-Roman statues, while the new collections concerned with chronology were those with recently excavated Greek material. Because the British Museum contained both kinds of material, the aesthetic and chronological ambiguities of the Graeco-Roman threatened the simple progression of chronology. By giving the Graeco-Roman material its own thematic arrangement, the British Museum could avoid this problem.

This is not the only case in which museums favoured chronological arrangements but were unable to apply them. For example, when the ancient sculpture from the Pio Clementino Museum was brought to the Louvre (which, as we have seen in chapter 1, favoured a didactic, chronological display for its paintings) the roughly thematic arrangement used in Rome was preserved.²⁴⁴ The thematic display was influenced by the difficulties of assigning dates to Greco-Roman sculpture and ultimately compromised by the desire to foreground the most famous statues.²⁴⁵ The museum's shifting circumstances and conflicting approaches to display can be seen in the *Salle de Diane*. This was a carefully constructed thematic space, designed to surround *Diane Chasseresse* (the most important ancient sculpture from the French royal collection) with images of the goddess' role in a range of myths.²⁴⁶ In this case, fame and theme

²⁴⁴ Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 153.

²⁴⁵ McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre*, 148-154; Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement*, 79.

²⁴⁶ Haskell and Penny *Taste and the Antique*, 196-8; P. Malgouryes, *Le Musée Napoléon. Louvre Promenades* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999), 28-29.

were not in conflict and the narrative content of the statue was used to emphasise its importance. But the statue was never shown there. Instead, pride of place went to antiquities seized from Berlin. An aesthetic and thematic agenda had been put aside for the pragmatic needs of a growing collection and the triumphal messages of this collection of national collections.

Subject matter was impossible to isolate from other features of art. The division of the statuary in the British Museum into mythological and non-mythological categories separated the real from the fantastical elements of ancient art. This reflects an enduring preoccupation with separating myth from genre scenes which imposes modern categories on ancient objects.²⁴⁷ Oldfield identified the division between mythological figures and “human life” with the contrast between ideal and realistic styles of art. This reflected traditional distinctions between the aims and style of mythological and genre painting. Myth was seen as a subject for the large-scale, idealised approach of history painting, whereas the best that scenes of everyday life could hope for was realistic imitation.²⁴⁸ Classical sculpture was explicitly seen as a model for the Grand Manner of history painting, so ancient art that was not suitably idealised needed to be reframed in other terms if these distinctions were to be maintained.²⁴⁹

As well as reflecting contemporary artistic orthodoxy, this arrangement enabled the museum to structure visitors’ experiences of art. Sculptures were grouped with similar works, allowing the museum to suggest a separation of the aesthetic from the historical and manage the public’s experience accordingly.

²⁴⁷ Gloria Ferrari, “Myth and Genre on Athenian Vases,” *Classical Antiquity* 22, 1 (2003): 37–54.

²⁴⁸ Helen Langdon, “Genre” in *Grove Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) accessed March 15, 2013, <http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T031326>.

²⁴⁹ David Mannings, “Grand Manner” in *Grove Art Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), accessed March 15, 2013, <http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T034044>.

On a practical level, grouping like with like must also have made it easier to produce the decorative pairings deemed visually appealing.²⁵⁰ But such groupings also invited visitors to reflect on specific historical themes, with gods as evidence of ancient religion, portrait busts representing the important figures of history and so on. In these terms, the museum's display does reflect the place of mythology in everyday life. Displays that were superficially thematic often served other aims, whether aesthetic, historical, ideological or practical. These aims can be difficult to deduce from the surviving records. We know that the Townley gallery in the British Museum was largely thematically arranged, but it lumped fishermen in with gods for no obvious reason.²⁵¹ This is hardly a good fit for the universal, rational system of display that the museum was aiming for and it may have been for this reason that the days of this approach were numbered. But this was not the end of mythology in museums. The same developments in archaeology that made museums rethink their traditional display approaches allowed them to experiment with new approaches that used myth to understand museum objects.

²⁵⁰ Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement*, 74.

²⁵¹ Sir Henry Ellis, *The Townley Gallery of Classic Sculpture in the British Museum* vol. 1 (London: M.A. Nattali, 1846), 221-222.

Myth in theory and practice

In a model that sees myth as a precursor and antithesis to chronology in museums, Charles Newton belongs firmly in the chronology camp. He is one of the foremost of Jenkins' "archaeologists" who campaigned for the arrangement of the British Museum by chronology and geography.²⁵² But Newton's model of archaeology (and so of the museum) was a broad one, encompassing most aspects of the ancient world, including myth. This section explores the importance of myth in Newton's museum work. It begins with his arguments for the interrelatedness of all kinds of ancient material in the British Museum, in which myth gives meaning to a wide range of ancient objects and allows everyday objects to inform an understanding of the most important works of art. It then goes on to consider what this meant for his museum work through the practical example of the *Guide to the Second Vase Room*, published in 1869 when Newton had been keeper of antiquities for eight years. The guide offers an example of Newton's all-encompassing approach (since the vase room contained more than just vases) and enables us to see the place of mythology in his model of the ancient world.

In 1853 another Select Committee was considering the future of the collections of art and design in London. The main issue was the organisation of the National Gallery but, in considering what belonged there, the committee raised questions about the disciplinary boundaries and display practices of all the major museums in London. The debates over these issues have rightly been seen as an important way for museums to work out and express their disciplinary boundaries, and this becomes particularly clear when one looks at the role of archaeology.²⁵³ The word archaeology was being used to cover not only the material we would think of as archaeological today, but also anything

²⁵² Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 56-74

²⁵³ Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*.

which was valued for historical, not aesthetic reasons. Some witnesses used it as synonymous with “curiosities” and objected to being made to walk past inferior specimens to get to aesthetically pleasing objects.²⁵⁴ The phrase “mere archaeological” (and variants of it) occurs in the testimony of several witnesses, implying a lesser status than art.²⁵⁵

One strategy in the debate over this art/archaeology dichotomy was to link “archaeological” material with literature. By this reasoning, ancient objects could be split according to whether they were most relevant to those interested in art or those interested in literature. The most common examples of “literary” antiquities were objects featuring writing, such as inscribed stones or coins; but writing was not an essential feature.²⁵⁶ There was an awareness that art and archaeology were not mutually exclusive and that many of the most valued works of art were also recognised to have historical importance.²⁵⁷ Edmund Oldfield raised the historical relevance of all ancient material as a major objection to splitting his collections.²⁵⁸ But even those who argued for a split, such as the former keeper of the National Gallery Sir Charles Eastlake, admitted that it was impossible to draw a clear line between art and literature.²⁵⁹ Both sides agreed that literature and art were two kinds of interest that museums could and should serve, but they differed over whether the two could coexist.

The appeal of associating historical value with literature is clear, given the dismissive and imprecise use of the word “archaeology” in much of the

²⁵⁴ House of Commons, *Report of the Select Committee on the National Gallery* (1853), 510-11.

²⁵⁵ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 490, 511, 527.

²⁵⁶ e.g. H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 356.

²⁵⁷ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 461, 592.

²⁵⁸ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 592-3.

²⁵⁹ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 460-1.

evidence heard by the Select Committee. Literature offered a well-established and highly valued body of knowledge and an alternative value system for archaeological material that did not live up to contemporary aesthetic standards. But it also took the emphasis away from the intrinsic qualities of objects and risked regarding them as a complement to written material. As we have seen in chapter 1, this distrust of objects as a source of information in their own right was long established. Here objects are clearly valued, but not in their own terms: they must be seen as either image or text. Against this background, it was difficult to argue for an archaeological (in our terms) approach to the British Museum's collections. It is important that one of archaeology's greatest defenders articulated his objection to a possible split, not by challenging the categories of art and literature, but by producing a more subtle model that subsumed these categories into an idea of ancient Greek society as a coherent whole.

Charles Newton's response to the Select Committee was sent in the form of a letter from Rhodes where he was serving as acting consul. Before this appointment, he had worked in the British Museum's department of antiquities. He was authorised to acquire antiquities for the museum while at Rhodes and he would later return there as keeper of Greek and Roman antiquities.²⁶⁰ The letter (which appeared as an appendix to the Select Committee report) aimed to convince the Select Committee that the British Museum's antiquities should be considered a single collection and not be split.²⁶¹ Newton got what he wanted (whether by the strength of his arguments or because of institutional inertia) but these arguments also had an afterlife in

²⁶⁰ B. F. Cook, 'Newton, Sir Charles Thomas (*bap.* 1816, *d.* 1894)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20051?docPos=1>.

²⁶¹ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 772.

his published writings.²⁶² They reflect wider debates about the status of archaeology and so inevitably incorporate the theme of literature.

Newton's defence begins, as we might expect from one of the great proponents of chronology at the British Museum, with a run through of the major cultures of the ancient world in the museum from Egypt to Rome. Unsurprisingly, the Elgin Marbles form the high point of this history of art, and this is underlined with literary analogies. He likened them to "the *Exemplaria* of classical literature" and referred to them as "a sculptured poem."²⁶³ This statement echoes the stress on poetics over politics that we have seen in responses to the Elgin Marbles in chapter 2. But literature also plays a more concrete role in Newton's arguments. He discusses Pausanias, alongside coins, gems, vases, bronzes and terracottas, as an important source of information for understanding the Parthenon.²⁶⁴ Narrative plays a particularly important part in Newton's idea of contextual evidence:

If we do not know what he [the sculptor] intended to express, we can judge of his design but little more certainly than those who venture to criticise a dramatic performance without understanding the language which the actors speak, nor the whole story of the action which passes before their eyes.

How much, for instance, has the interest of the figure in the Gallery of Florence, commonly called "The Listening Slave" been enhanced since this figure has been recognised as part of a group representing the flaying of Marsyas by Apollo; how much of the beauty of the design on the Portland Vase is lost to us, because we cannot be quite sure that the

²⁶² Charles T. Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology* (London: Macmillan, 1880), 39-72.

²⁶³ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 774.

²⁶⁴ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 774.

ingenious explanation of this bas-relief proposed by Mr Millingen is the true one.

The interpretation of ancient sculpture, that is to say, the assigning [sic] names to the several figures, and motives for the actions represented, can only be accomplished by the diligent collection of other classes of antiquities.²⁶⁵

Despite Newton's commitment to telling the grand narrative of art history through chronological displays, he still thought subject matter vital for understanding individual works of art. Indeed he thought it impossible to understand their full beauty without it. For Newton, the stories told by ancient works of art bound together disparate object types and made the collections of the British Museum worth much more than the sum of their parts. To underline this, he returned to the analogy between literature and art:

Greek sculpture, as I before observed, cannot be explained by its own internal evidence any more than the text of an ancient author can be explained without glosses and commentaries.²⁶⁶

This stresses a much closer "reading" of sculpture, similar to philological study. While a letter to a government committee was not the place to explore what such study would entail in any depth, Newton does give the beginnings of an explanation in his discussion of Greek vases. Again, narrative (in this case, myth) was important:

The subjects of these pictures are almost always mythical scenes; and thus a collection of Greek vases presents to us a complete treasure of those popular legends which circulated through the agency of art and

²⁶⁵ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 775.

²⁶⁶ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 775.

song, and formed the staple out of which the poet or the sculptor fashioned their immortal works.

The myth, as treated by the vase-painter, differed from the same myth when amplified and adorned by the genius of Pheidias and Polygnotos, as the ballad differs from the epic.²⁶⁷

Newton compared visual culture to literary genre hierarchy to express its varying quality and tone. But in this case, art and literature were also doing the same thing: telling stories. In this respect, the material record is presented as more complete than the literary one: able to provide knowledge of stories that would be otherwise lost. This can be seen as part of a wider attempt to theorise the relationship between image and text, and the specific differences in the ways the two media depict stories that began with Lessing's *Laokoon* and continues to be a vital part of any "reading" of a mythological image.²⁶⁸ Newton's model is one in which art and text are closely related and in which neither speaks for itself without an understanding of their wider context. A particularly important part of this context for Newton was the oral tradition.

By mentioning the distinction between the ballad and the epic, Newton evoked a major issue in contemporary scholarship: the idea of lost oral sources for the works of Homer. This had been a topic of debate since Freidrich August Wolf's arguments for the oral sources of Homer and the possibilities of reconstructing these by close examination of the text.²⁶⁹ This approach to literature had a lot in common with Newton's approach to archaeology, with its complex history of influences and innovations and emphasis on detailed study. Karl Otfried Müller

²⁶⁷ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 776.

²⁶⁸ H.A. Shapiro, *Myth Into Art: Poet and Painter in Classical Greece* (London: Routledge, 1994), 7; Klaus Junker, *Interpreting the images of Greek Myths*, trans. Annemarie Künzl-Snodgrass and Anthony Snodgrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁶⁹ Robert Fowler, "The Homeric Question" in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 224-232.

is another likely influence with his interest in isolating Greek myth from its literary representations and in viewing it in the context of Greek society as a whole.²⁷⁰ Awareness of the amount of ancient literature that has been lost had never been greater and Newton was claiming a role for the myths represented on vases in the effort to understand lost stories. This raised the possibility that vases could hold the answers for students of myth and literature, just as they had for those trying to figure out what ancient statuary depicted. He did not elaborate on this in the context of his letter, but we shall see it raised more explicitly by one of his students in the next section of this chapter.

Newton's sense of lost tradition is not limited to textual reconstruction, and the idea (raised in the quote above) that Greek vases represent "popular legends" offered the possibility of retrieving other aspects of life for "ordinary" people in the ancient world:

...the Greek myth being essentially popular, and the gods and heroes who form its *dramatis personae* being almost always invested with the outward form, motives of action, manners and external circumstances of humanity, the vase-pictures on which these myths are represented reflect the image of the real life of the Greek people, and have thus preserved to us a thousand curious details of costume, armour &c., which we should not otherwise have known.²⁷¹

Newton here complicated the conventional dichotomy between myth and genre - the myths on vases were told by ordinary people, and looked like everyday life in the ancient world. While Newton still divided images on vases by subject matter, his model saw all vase images as part of the "real life" of the Greek people. By situating tellings of myth in their social context, and particularly

²⁷⁰ Karl Otfried Müller, *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology*, trans. John Leitch (London: Longman, Brown and Green and Longmans, 1844), 1-8.

²⁷¹ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 776.

because of the realism of their depictions, Newton saw them as just as relevant to reality as genre scenes. This was a dangerous argument to make to a Select Committee which saw Greek vases as problematic objects whose daily use might prevent them from being seen as art.²⁷² This was the sort of reasoning that threatened to divide the museum's collections, and Newton was clearly cautious of lending support to this. He stressed the value of Greek vases in aesthetic terms. They are presented as carriers of images, rather than everyday objects:

A large number of the vases in this collection are decorated with pictures representing mythical subjects. These vase-pictures are of the greatest interest, while the interest attaching to the vase itself as a mere article of ingenious manufacture is comparatively small.²⁷³

"Ingenious manufacture" evokes the craft and industrial values that had become increasingly important for British museums since the Great Exhibition and were most strongly associated with the South Kensington Museum - then in a very early stage and referred to as the Museum of Manufactures at Marlborough House.²⁷⁴ Vases came up in the evidence to the Select Committee as an example of a type of ancient material that might be particularly useful to modern manufacturers - doubtless a reference to the success of Wedgwood.²⁷⁵ This relevance to decorative arts could pose problems for their fine art status. In prioritising images on vases over their form and use, Newton was stating where Greek vases belonged as much as what was important about them. But,

²⁷² Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, 98.

²⁷³ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 776; Appendix XII, 775.

²⁷⁴ Clive Wainwright, and Charlotte Gere, "The Making of the South Kensington Museum II Collecting Modern Manufactures : 1851 and the Great Exhibition," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14, 1 (2002): 25-44.

²⁷⁵ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, 461; Ian Jenkins, "'Contemporary Minds' Sir William Hamilton's Affair with Antiquity," 60.

as we have seen above, this did not mean denying their practical usefulness or the popular nature of their subject matter. Instead Newton challenged “so invidious a line of demarcation” separating fine arts from decorative ones that prevents modern viewers from understanding the influence of high art on other artistic productions in the ancient world.²⁷⁶ His emphasis on vases as part of a lost tradition allowed him to treat them as evidence for lost ancient paintings (and an easier to collect alternative to surviving ancient paintings) that would fit the committee’s conception of high art. It made this claim for them as art while also also tying them into a system of literary knowledge.

It was not just that Newton saw archaeology as a way of recovering lost information that might benefit the understanding of art, philology and mythology; he also thought that these disciplines were essential parts of archaeology. In a talk given to the Archaeological Institute in 1850 called *On the Study of Archaeology*, he described three branches of archaeology: the oral, the written and the monumental.²⁷⁷ This was a vision of archaeology as the study of the ancient past in its entirety strongly reminiscent of the arguments put forward to the Select Committee. Newton’s all-encompassing view of antiquity was clearly more than just a rhetorical position against losing some of the British Museum’s star pieces. In *On the Study of Archaeology* Newton also deepens and expands on the letter’s arguments.

For Newton, archaeology was much more than the shallow antiquarianism dismissed by the committee and it was not limited to excavation and the study of material culture. Rather, its purpose was “to collect, to classify and to interpret all the evidence of man’s history not already incorporated in Printed Literature.”²⁷⁸ The result includes the study of folklore, ritual and custom,

²⁷⁶ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 778.

²⁷⁷ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 1-38.

²⁷⁸ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 2.

linguistics, palaeography, editing unpublished literature, myth, art and architecture. Myth was considered an important body of information that any of these approaches might illuminate. So, for example, Newton encouraged archaeologists to look for myth in the oral traditions of living peasants; to hope that undeciphered writing systems contain the evidence to make mythic figures into historical ones; to understand the mutual influence of artistic and literary depictions of myth and to explore the influence of other cultures on the development of Greek myth.²⁷⁹

But despite this ambitious remit for his discipline, archaeology itself was seen as existing to serve history:

The relation of Archaeology to History as a ministering and subsidiary study, as the key to stores of information inaccessible or unknown to the scholar, as an independent witness to the truth of Printed Record.²⁸⁰

This superficially underlines the dominance of textual history. But Newton hoped to use these methods to extend history's focus to other kinds of evidence. The museum was an essential tool for this model of archaeology, able to present the full breadth of its subjects of study:

A museum of antiquities is to the Archaeologist what a botanical garden is to the Botanist: it presents his subject compendiously, synoptically, suggestively, not in the desultory and accidental order in which he would otherwise be brought in contact with its details.²⁸¹

Archaeology could be studied in many places, like studying plants in the wild. But the arrangement of material in the museum would both represent the

²⁷⁹ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 4, 15, 22.

²⁸⁰ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 36.

²⁸¹ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 37.

current state of archaeological understanding and create the perfect conditions for extending it. The difficulties of laying out less tangible forms of knowledge, such as myth, remained. To understand how successfully Newton's theories were incorporated in the museum it will be helpful to consider an example of display at the British Museum under his keepership.

We have seen how vases were a particularly important kind of evidence for Newton - they could be read in their own right or compared to other kinds of material, informing an understanding of everything from the most outlandish stories to the everyday experiences of ancient Greeks. Newton saw them as an inherently narrative medium, which means that the vase room offers a good case study to understand the status of myth in museum display and its relationship to Newton's wider theories. Where some nineteenth century vase catalogues were detailed contributions to the study of vases in their own right, the *Guide to the Second Vase Room* published in 1869 is a practical example of museum interpretation.²⁸² It was part of the *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum* - a series of guide books brought out regularly in an attempt to provide an up-to-date guide to the museum as a whole. An introductory note by Newton makes clear that the guide was intended to be used in the museum space and advises visitors on how to find the objects mentioned. The guide covered only some of the objects on display, which were marked with blue labels to help visitors find them. The display was not regarded as permanently fixed: the guide encourages visitors to consult attendants if they cannot find something.²⁸³ While the guide does not contain enough information for a complete reconstruction of the second vase room, it can give us a good sense of

²⁸² One of the most influential was Otto Jahn's *Beschreibung der Vasensammlung König Ludwigs in der Pinakothek zu München* (Munich: Jos. Lindauer'sche Buchhandlung, 1854)

²⁸³ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities*. (London: British Museum, 1869), 2-5.

the sort of material on display and which objects were considered to be the important things to see.

Probably the most obvious correspondence to Newton's ideas was that, despite being called a vase room, it also contained a range of other kinds of objects. For example, Table Case A included vases, a sculpted head, lead tablets, samples of minerals, painters' palettes, a fragment of cloth and a wax torch.²⁸⁴ This sort of variety of material is reminiscent of the museum's later "Greek and Roman Life" galleries, the first of which was introduced in the early 20th century.²⁸⁵

Given Newton's emphasis on the importance of rational arrangement to making sense of archaeology, it is tempting to look for the sort of thematic links between objects that typify Greek and Roman Life galleries. Certainly some of the material must have been conceptually related - the mineral samples were pigment types and so closely linked with the painters' palette. But it is difficult to imagine a single theme that might link them with the curse tablets and the two vases of the "best period" which the guide explicitly states should have been in the first vase room.²⁸⁶ Table Case A is a particularly varied example, but the problems of making sense of its contents are replayed throughout the gallery.

This confusing mixture may well reflect the difference between theory and practice in museums. Resources, collections and space never quite seem to live up to curators' hopes and certainly it took a long time to realise anything close to Newton's archaeological vision for the British Museum's antiquities galleries.²⁸⁷ These conflicts seem to be embodied in the guide book itself which,

²⁸⁴ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 10-11, 33-5.

²⁸⁵ *A Guide to the Exhibition Illustrating Greek and Roman Life* (London: British Museum, 1908).

²⁸⁶ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 33-5.

²⁸⁷ Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 56-59

despite its intended use as supplementary information in the gallery, does not follow the order of the arrangement. The book orders its contents by object type. Vases come first, ordered by shape, followed by terracotta figures, terracotta mural reliefs, Roman mural paintings; carvings in various media, weights, glass, porcelain, alabaster and, finally, "Miscellaneous objects."²⁸⁸ The case numbers given by the guide show that these groupings were often spread across the gallery and jumbled together with others. The wall cases broadly corresponded to the first three categories, in order, but vases were not ordered by type and, as we have seen, vases and terracottas were also mixed in with other types of material.

The introduction to the guide is less than three pages long. In contrast with the deep exploration of vase collecting, discovery, production and meaning in other nineteenth-century vase catalogues, it could not hope to be comprehensive.²⁸⁹ Instead, it set the agenda for experiencing this particular gallery. In keeping with Newton's theories, the introduction to the guide places the emphasis on different periods of vase production, distinguished by stylistic analysis. In particular, that the vases in the second vase room were of a later date than those in the first, and so represented a "period of decline."²⁹⁰ This division of the vases represented an aesthetic form of chronology, in which similar time periods denoted similar quality. Differentiating by quality seems to have been more important than true chronology: the guide was apologetic for including vases of the "finest period" in the second vase room, but was not troubled by the inclusion of much earlier material, such as Cycladic figurines.²⁹¹ The introduction does also try to give some cultural context for the vases in the

²⁸⁸ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 3.

²⁸⁹ Compare Otto Jahn, *Beschreibung der Vasensammlung König Ludwigs*.

²⁹⁰ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 3.

²⁹¹ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 11, 40.

room, particularly those from South Italy.²⁹² But, in keeping with the gallery's name, only vases are discussed, making the other material in the space seem something of an afterthought.

Despite the clear emphasis on vases in the title and introduction, each object mentioned in the guide is deemed worthy of at least some explanation. It is in these individual object descriptions that some of Newton's broader ideas can be seen. The standard formula for describing individual vases distinguishes them by which story they represent. The guide does not tell the stories in full, but references them by the names of the protagonists and a brief indication of what is going on, such as "Contest of Apollo and Hêraklês for the Tripod" or "The Centaur Asbolos striking on the breast the Lapith Hoplos."²⁹³ Myth was clearly seen as an important feature of the vases. The way that myths were named but not further explained indicates an expected audience who know the myths but cannot be expected to identify visual representations of them.

In some cases, additional information is added about issues like date of manufacture, place of discovery, specifics of iconography or the forms of inscriptions. But usually only when something about the vase is deemed exceptional. This reflects the priorities about Greek vases set out by Newton: there is a standard form of interpretation for vases, based on shape, date and the scenes depicted on them. On top of this, individual vases can provide evidence of other sorts. Few vases had named find spots or were clearly dated and this reflects the state of knowledge about the British Museum's collections. Newton was certainly not the first to hold these priorities, but naming the myths represented on a vase was an important way for the museum to distinguish it from other similar objects. Imagery was deemed the most distinctive feature of the vases. This approach focused viewer attention on vase

²⁹² *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 3-4.

²⁹³ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 5.

paintings, but there was little in-depth analysis of them. While Newton had high hopes for archaeologists deepening their understanding of lost narratives through vase painting, the average visitor only needed a brief indication of what was going on.

The non-vase material in the vase room does not have the convenient formula of shape and image to describe it and most of it received less detailed descriptions. Where it had a narrative subject matter (such as the terracottas or paintings) this was discussed in much the same way. Terracottas represented recognisable figures and stories, but the way this medium represented myth was deemed more difficult to pin down:

These figures exhibit a variety of male and female types; some of which may be at once recognised as mythical personages, while to the majority no name can be assigned; many are probably mere studies taken from real life.²⁹⁴

This is a rare acknowledgement of the ambiguity between myth and life in ancient art. As we have seen, this distinction is particularly modern, based upon ideas about genre and the superiority of idealised representation. Here one medium and similar style is used to represent the two supposedly different categories, but the hierarchy remains, with the representations of everyday life dismissed as “mere studies.” The guide makes no great claims for the artistic quality of the mythic terracottas either, both are seen as sketch-like:

These figures are not to be regarded as elaborate works of art. They are modelled with great freedom and sometimes a little carelessly; but in the attitudes, and in the composition of the drapery they show a felicity and boldness of invention, which is well worthy of the attention of the

²⁹⁴ *A Guide to the Second Vase Room*, 24-25.

modern artist. Many of them seem like sketches in clay, taken from the life, or studies and recollections of the works of great sculptors.

When we consider that they were in most cases the cheap and common product of the mere modeller, *koroplathos* we see how generally a knowledge of art must have been diffused among the Hellenic people.

Myth was the subject matter of Greek monumental art and, in keeping with Newton's arguments to the Select Committee, the guide sees all representations of myth as part of a tradition of art in which the simplest clay votives captured the essence of the greatest masterpieces. As with traditional thematic displays, myth had an elevating capacity in the *Guide to the Second Vase Room*, but this was not because of a more idealised style. The terracottas were not seen as high art, whether they depicted myth or everyday life; indeed it was clearly difficult to tell them apart. Rather, myth could elevate even minor works of art by offering glimpses into lost masterpieces and lost stories.

This potential of mythological art might have escaped visitors to the second vase room - even those with the guidebook in-hand would have found mostly straightforward descriptions of individual objects. However, there were other forms of interpretation available to visitors to the British Museum in the late nineteenth century. The next section looks at how tours of the British Museum's collections by another influential scholar picked up on Newton's ideas in ways that gave even more emphasis to myth: telling stories rather than simply naming them.

Myths of the Odyssey in the British Museum

Jane Harrison's 1882 book, *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* was the result of a highly popular series of talks at the British Museum. Harrison is generally studied for her influential ideas about Greek religion and her place among the Cambridge Ritualists. As a result, her work at the British Museum tends to be treated as an episode in the early life of a great scholar, and probed for the first traces of her later thought. But it also offers a glimpse into a side of the nineteenth-century British Museum that is rarely seen - the talks and tours that must have shaped many museum-goers' experiences, but of which few traces remain. I want to put this stage of Harrison's career back into its museum context, and argue that this is the best way to make sense of the lectures and hence the book that they became. As well as the well-documented influence of Newton's ideas on Harrison and the close analysis of objects that museum work promotes, this section looks at how Harrison incorporated contemporary ideas about the role of the museum to make a case for myths being "popular" in ways never put forward by Newton and how Harrison experimented with unorthodox approaches to museum collections to interest her audience.

Lectures tend to be ignored by museum histories and the few exceptions to this rule are lectures that explicitly discuss the role and structure of the museum.²⁹⁵ This neglect is somewhat understandable, since lectures are ephemeral by nature and not part of the processes of collecting and display at the museum's heart. However, it does mean that histories of museums tend to focus on textual approaches and ignore the variety of ways in which museums have been experienced. If anything, lectures must have been more important to nineteenth-century museum visitors than they are today, since the British Museum did not provide much written information in the galleries. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, Pitt-Rivers complained that the British Museum

²⁹⁵ For example: D. M. Wilson, "A Hungarian in London: Pulszky's 1851 Lecture," *Journal of the History of Collections*, 22 (2) (2010): 271-278.

was failing in its duty to educate the public and needed to hire more people to write labels.²⁹⁶ Lectures like those of Jane Harrison may have filled in some of this gap. They offered direct interpretation of museum objects in the gallery space. In this respect, they were not very different from the guide book looked at in the previous section. But they represent quite a different approach to the museum's contents which makes it all the more worthwhile to try and understand these fleeting experiences more than a century ago.

The agenda for studying Harrison's lectures seems to follow her own estimation of this period:

I was lecturing on art, a subject for which I had no natural gifts. My reactions to art are, I think, always second-hand; hence about art, I am docile and open to persuasion. In literature I am absolutely sure of my own tastes and a whole Bench of Bishops could not alter my convictions. Happily, however, bit by bit, art and archaeology led to mythology, mythology merged in religion; there I was at home.²⁹⁷

While there has been more interest in recent years in this period of her scholarship in its own right, Harrison's lectures are still seen as derivative.²⁹⁸ There is certainly nothing new about them art-historically, but taken as a form of museum interpretation, her focus on storytelling is radical. *Myths of the Odyssey* also offers a fascinating glimpse of the meeting point between archaeological thought and a non-expert public. Harrison's approach to myth is based on Newton's theories, but put his ideas to practical use and engaged much more directly with the stories themselves. While Harrison turned her

²⁹⁶ Pitt Rivers to Mr Rudler, May 23rd, 1898. S&SWM PR papers L2096a "Rethinking Pitt-Rivers" accessed March 8, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/primary-documents-index/14-general/612-saswm-pr-papers-l2096a>.

²⁹⁷ Jane Ellen Harrison, "Reminiscences of a Student's Life," 312–346.

²⁹⁸ Stefano Evangelista, "Lessons in Greek Art: Jane Harrison and Aestheticism," *Women's Studies* 40, 4 (April 26, 2011): 513–536.

back on this approach later in her career, and it was never really picked up in museums, her lectures can tell us a lot about the museum context at this time and show us an approach very different from our expectations of nineteenth-century museums.

In 1879, having just finished her Cambridge education, Harrison arrived in London. By 1880 she was studying archaeology under Newton at the British Museum.²⁹⁹ In an interview she gave more than ten years later, she traced the beginning of her lecturing career back to a spontaneous suggestion by Newton that she take groups of ladies round the gallery.³⁰⁰ In the same interview she recalled lecturing to two or three people only, in contrast with later audiences of over a thousand. The early talks in the British Museum seem to have been guided tours, with groups limited to thirty moving around the galleries and pausing to focus on specific objects.³⁰¹ In 1887, Harrison began lecturing to larger audiences at the South Kensington Museum. South Kensington was an important venue for this sort of public education and, as we will see in the next section of the chapter, it was more willing to explore classical and archaeological subjects than we might expect of an institution without archaeological collections of its own. Harrison also lectured on mythology for the University Extension Society and wrote articles for popular publications.³⁰² Accounts of this period of Harrison's career tend to elide all of her talks, but the atmosphere of her early tours of the galleries of the British Museum must have

²⁹⁹ Anabel Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 56-7.

³⁰⁰ "A Woman's View of the Greek Question: An Interview with Miss Jane Harrison," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, November 4, 1891, 1-2.

³⁰¹ Robinson, *Jane Ellen Harrison*, 75-6.

³⁰² "On Friday," *Illustrated London News*, February 1, 1890, 156; Harrison, "Greek Myths in Greek Art," *The Magazine of Art*, January 1882, 502-510.

been quite different from her later lectures in darkened rooms with lantern slides and even sound effects.³⁰³

We have to rely on Harrison for an account of her audiences, which she described as coming from “all the educated classes” but being dominated by wealthy ladies and mothers wanting to support their children’s education. She herself admitted that this sense of her audiences was derived from those she spoke to after her London talks, and may not have been fully representative. She also described their level of interest:

What people want who attend lectures on Greek subjects is not a deep insight into these subjects. They want to know something, not very much, of the life and manners of a highly-cultured and intellectual race of olden times. It is curiosity rather than a desire for thorough knowledge that prompts them. Not an idle curiosity, by any means. They are sincerely interested, but only superficially, and that fact the lecturer on Greek subject to general audiences should never forget.³⁰⁴

Harrison’s estimation of her audiences might explain the recorded responses from people who heard her speak: that her tone was patronising or overenthusiastic.³⁰⁵ It is worth noting that the reports we have of her lecturing style come from other intellectuals, and it is hard to know whether they were representative of the feelings of her audience as a whole.

Myths of the Odyssey was written in the first year of this lecturing career and so offers good evidence for its early stages at the British Museum. But it can be

³⁰³ Mary Beard, *The Invention of Jane Harrison*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 58.

³⁰⁴ “A Woman’s View of the Greek Question,” 2.

³⁰⁵ Beard, *Invention of Jane Harrison*, 56-7.

difficult to pin down the relationship between the book and the lectures.³⁰⁶

While the book was one step removed from the museum context, the influence of the British Museum remained strong. Newton checked the proof of the book and his theories were picked up in its arguments.³⁰⁷ *Myths of the Odyssey* was clearly written as a stand-alone work, not as a guide to the museum experience, but it stressed the importance of museum visiting for a full understanding of its content:

The pictures I offer are themselves but the shadows, more or less faithful, of other pictures. Where we can look at the original, no copy must suffice us. Some of these originals are in our own Museum. These we are bound to study... Even a few hours will make the dead pictures of the book a living reality; but I repeat again, and can scarcely repeat too often, the training of taste, which is the essential condition of close sympathy with Greek feeling, whether in art or literature, can only come to us by constant looking, by a slow and long-protracted process of habituation, by the exercise of a spirit rather receptive than critical. To such a process it is my highest hope that this book may serve as an initiation.³⁰⁸

Harrison hoped this book would be an introduction to a lifelong engagement with Greek art. Her emphasis on access to original material means that this engagement must inevitably include visits to museums, but it also aimed to shape the way readers experienced the museum by introducing them to a particular way of looking at the objects. Harrison's tone is heavily didactic, not just about her subject matter but also about her audience's approach to it - even

³⁰⁶ Beard, *Invention of Jane Harrison*, 100.

³⁰⁷ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (London: Rivingtons, 1882), xv.

³⁰⁸ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, xiii.

when warning her audience to be skeptical of her theories.³⁰⁹ This makes sense in a context in which visitor numbers in museums were increasing and anxieties about whether visitors were behaving appropriately and learning the right lessons were commonly expressed.³¹⁰ Certainly her goals were explicitly educational:

May I add one word as to the end I hope to attain? I believe the educational value of a study of archaeology to consist far more in the discipline of taste and feeling it affords than in the gain of definite information it has to offer. Greek art does, it is true, occasionally elucidate obscure passages in Greek literature; but such verbal intelligence is but the sall [sic] coin she deals out to the hirelings who clamour for payment, not the treasure she lays up as guerdon for her true servants. Such verbal intelligence may be gained in a moment and lightly passed from hand to hand; but the best gifts of archaeology, - the trained eye, quick instinct, pure taste, well-balanced emotion, - these we may be thankful if we gain in a lifetime; and each man must strive to attain them for himself...To such a process it is my highest hope that this book may serve as an initiation.³¹¹

Harrison went as far as to dismiss the factual information of scholarship for a more general sense of refinement and taste. The use of “hirelings” (with its implications of short-term manual labour) to dismiss literary scholars who mine ancient art for information inverts the standard association of texts with intellectual work and objects with manual labour. For Harrison, ancient Greek craftsmen were capable of deep insight, which many of her contemporaries were too obtuse to see and there is a telling irony in casting those who study

³⁰⁹ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, xiii-xiv.

³¹⁰ “Chapter 3: The Public in the Museum” in Siegel, *The Emergence of the Modern Museum*, 79-82.

³¹¹ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, xii-xiii.

Greek art as its servants. Her introduction argues that craftsmanship was more highly valued in the ancient world, including by Homer's characters, many of whom were described as skilled craftsmen.³¹²

Her emphasis on art over "verbal intelligence" reflects Newton's repositioning of Archaeology as something that could reach beyond the scope of literature. But her emphasis on emotional connection and desire to bring Greek art to a broader audience owes much to the aesthetic movement. She used this approach to carve out her own particular niche, using her public lectures to gain authority and her expertise in archaeology to counteract her comparative disadvantage in ancient languages.³¹³ Her approach was also well matched to museums at this time, particularly the South Kensington Museum, which were also important sites for developing and disseminating aesthetic ideas about beauty and public education.³¹⁴

Harrison's dismissal of the insights that art could give into literature may have been overstated for rhetorical effect in the passage quoted above. Certainly elsewhere she described art as an "unread commentary" (unread both because it is not written and because it is largely ignored) with new insights to offer.³¹⁵ And, by framing Greek art in the narrative of the *Odyssey*, she seems to value text over object:

By two voices the tales of Homer have been told to us: to one of these we too often neglect to listen. Because the myths of Homer himself are told in words that are matchless, is it well that the story which art has left us should remain unread? The vase-painter and the gem engraver

³¹² Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, x.

³¹³ Evangelista, "Lessons in Greek Art."

³¹⁴ Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement," *Studies in Art Education* 33, 3 (1992): 165.

³¹⁵ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, viii.

are indeed sometimes humbler artists than the great epic poet; sometimes they are mere craftsmen, and their work little beyond the rudest symbolic word-painting; but they are Greeks, and they may help us to understand somewhat better the spirit of their mighty kinsman.³¹⁶

Despite the place of this paragraph in an argument for greater study of objects, Harrison seems to maintain the conventional elevation of text over image in describing Homer as “matchless” and craftsmen as “humbler.” Both objects and literature, high art and low offered ways to get at the “spirit” of ancient Greece. Perhaps it is unsurprising that a book that used the appeal of Homer to get its audience to take an interest in Greek art reflects this conventional hierarchy. Homer was perceived as the peak of the literary canon (ancient and modern) with a particular importance for the nineteenth-century imagination.³¹⁷ Given Newton’s belief that the material record preserved a greater range of quality and skill than the literary one, this comparison of the peak of literature with more average works of art need not necessarily reflect on the relative status of the two means of expression.

While the famous names and stories of ancient literature lurked behind much appreciation of ancient art, Harrison was unusual in making such an explicit and detailed comparison between art and literature. Her desire to see both art and literature as part of the same field of study played an important role in her scholarship and teaching throughout her life. It also reflected broader disciplinary changes and would lead to the inclusion of archaeology in the discipline of classics.³¹⁸ The study of the ancient world was changing rapidly

³¹⁶ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, vii.

³¹⁷ Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, 192-4.

³¹⁸ Mary Beard, “The Invention (and Re-invention) of “Group D”: An Archaeology of the Classical Tripes 1879–1984,” in *Classics in 19th and 20th Century Cambridge: Curriculum, Culture and Community*, ed. Christopher Stray (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1998), 95–134.

and one of the most dramatic examples of this was the study of Homer. As we have seen in the previous section, debate had opened up about when, how and by whom Homeric poetry had been composed. Harrison was able to use contemporary interest in Homer to attract her audience, making a claim for ancient art as a way to answer the “Homeric question.” While she marked out Homer as superior to most ancient craftsmen, she was keen to emphasise (as in Newton’s writings) that archaeology could reconstruct lost aspects of ancient experiences and stories.

The main body of the book focuses on storytelling: much of it quoted in bulk from Butcher and Lang’s translation of the *Odyssey*, pausing at key moments to introduce and explain relevant works of art. The chapters follow the order of events in the *Odyssey* from the Cyclops to Scylla and Charybdis. While the introduction stresses that the telling is led by Homer, Harrison also looks at alternative forms of the myth once the Homeric version is told. For example, the Cyclops episode is told as in *Odyssey* 9, but then other versions of the Cyclopes are explored: the talented craftsmen and builders of cyclopean masonry, Polyphemus’ love of Galatea and the equivalents of the Cyclopes in other mythologies and contemporary folklore.³¹⁹ Thus, while Homer provides the main impetus, this is seen as one part of a broader mythology that encompassed material culture, folklore and literature.

Harrison’s approach picks up on many of the techniques that Newton wanted to include in archaeology. In this sense, *Myths of the Odyssey* is an answer to Newton’s call for a new approach to the study of mythography in his Select Committee letter. As in Newton’s writings, Harrison makes a case for exploring a broad cultural context in which all things produced by ancient Greeks offer a way to understand their culture as a whole.³²⁰ In other regards, Harrison

³¹⁹ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, 1-44.

³²⁰ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, xii.

departs from Newton's approach, especially the chronology that he favoured in his galleries and writings. The introduction of *Myths of the Odyssey* states (in agreement with Newton) that chronology is the best way of telling a pure history of art but describes it as impossible to bring literary and artistic narrative together in a chronological history. In *Myths of the Odyssey*, Harrison rejected chronology (with its grand narrative of cultural progress and decline) in favour of an approach led by a specific mythic narrative.³²¹ Doubtless the freedom enjoyed by the lecturer/author over the curator is at work here: Harrison could pick her examples around her theme and did not have to worry about representing a complete history in the way Newton did. This allowed Harrison to go one step further than Newton in her argument for the significance of myth. She was able to use humble works of craft to comment on a great work of literature. For Newton, objects could not be fully understood without their stories; for Harrison this was true, but additionally stories could not be fully understood without objects.

In Newton's model, mythological readings of objects are fundamental to a full understanding of ancient objects. Newton's approach requires considerable expertise to compare a large corpus of objects and texts. Harrison's approach makes mythological readings of objects much more directly accessible - bringing together the objects to compare and filling in the story as background information. In telling the story, as well as discussing its iconography, Harrison broadened her potential audience to those who may not have read the texts. While the *Guide to the Second Vase Room* acknowledged that viewers might not be familiar with the ways that myths were depicted, Harrison's interpretation was also accessible to those who did not know the story. This was important for an audience of women whose own education in the classics would have been limited, but who knew all too well how much society valued these stories.

³²¹ Harrison, *Myths of the Odyssey*, viii.

Harrison described these women as keen to support their children's education and, given the literary slant of contemporary education, a narrative framework allowed Harrison to make ancient art not only interesting, but also useful to her audience.³²²

Newton had described myth as "essentially popular" in his response to the Select Committee, but he had meant that it was something enjoyed by ordinary people in the ancient world and representative of their lives.³²³ Harrison's use of myth in public lectures made myth popular in the contemporary world too. The public needed to be educated on myth, but these stories could also offer a way into other important themes. Because myth was seen as something that transcended text, it was a literary form that could be particularly at home in the museum. We have seen the anxieties expressed by people with an interest in public education (e.g. Thirlwall, as discussed in chapter 2) over the inability of many members of the public to engage with original texts, and their hopes that museums might offer an alternative classical education. Myth was similarly freed from the need to understand ancient languages, and had the benefit of familiarity, since the general public may have had more contact with myths indirectly than with original ancient texts.³²⁴ Because myth had this sort of popular appeal, alongside real scholarly interest, it matched the two aspects of museums' aims at this time.

Harrison's interest in Homer saw the epics as the product of a whole culture and a wide variety of story variants, and as an interesting hook to draw museum visitors into this world. Another peripheral figure in the London museum culture in the late nineteenth century had even greater success at

³²² "A Woman's View of the Greek Question," 2.

³²³ H. C., *Select Committee National Gallery*, Appendix XII, 776.

³²⁴ Edith Hall and Fiona Macintosh *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 388-390.

stirring public interest with Homer, but with a radically different approach to myth. Like Harrison, Schliemann was looking for the lost sources of myth, but went back even further to look for the sites and events described by Homer. In seeing these stories as a form of history, with sites that could be visited, excavated and understood, Schliemann made the relationship between myth and the museum much more direct, but also more controversial.

Troy in London

Heinrich Schliemann is an important but difficult figure in the history of archaeology. His excavations laid the foundation for the modern study of Aegean prehistory, but the haste with which his excavations were conducted, his tendency to self-mythologise and the strangeness of many of his theories rule out pure celebration of his achievements.³²⁵ His career has been well scrutinised from all angles, from hagiography through to outright accusation of fraud.³²⁶ Despite this, his museum work remains under-explored, apart from a couple of publications of his letters from museum archives.³²⁷ Schliemann's museum exhibitions also tend to be mentioned in passing in broader accounts of his work and the "Schliemania" which gripped the public in the wake of his discoveries.³²⁸ Schliemann was clearly most preoccupied with his fieldwork, but seems to have taken great care to communicate his finds through temporary exhibitions and to secure a prestigious permanent home for them. Given the emphasis elsewhere on Schliemann's self-presentation through his work, it seems strange that this highly public aspect of his career has been largely overlooked.

Schliemann is most famous for excavating some of the key sites from Homer, including Mycenae, Tyrins and Troy, and his work is essential to understanding the relationship between archaeology and ancient stories in his period. This

³²⁵ Fitton, *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age*, 48-71.

³²⁶ Emil Ludwig, *Schliemann of Troy: The Story of a Goldseeker* (London: Unwin Brothers, 1931); David A. Traill, *Excavating Schliemann: Collected Papers on Schliemann* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993).

³²⁷ Geraldine Saherwala et al. ed., *Heinrich Schliemanns "Sammlung Trojanischer Altertümer": Beiträge Zur Chronik Einer Grossen Erwerbung Der Berliner Museen*, (Berlin: Spiess, 1993); Lesley Fitton, *Heinrich Schliemann and the British Museum*, (London: British Museum, 1991).

³²⁸ Caroline Moorehead, *The Lost Treasures of Troy* (London: QPD, 1994), 175-6; Debbie Challis, *From the Harpy Tomb to the Wonders of Ephesus: British Archaeologists in the Ottoman Empire 1840-1880* (London: Duckworth, 2008), 153; D.F. Easton, "Priam's Gold: The Full Story," *Anatolian Studies* 44 (1994): 230-232.

section of the chapter will look at his exhibition at the South Kensington Museum of his finds from the site of Hissarlik in modern Turkey, which he identified with Homeric Troy. This exhibition offers a glimpse of what happens when a museum claims to display tangible evidence of a location and events once considered mythical. By drawing on archival material and published accounts of this exhibition, it is possible to reconstruct how Schliemann used the museum to communicate his ideas, and the debates over the role of archaeology and literature that he stirred up.

As we have seen, Schliemann's exhibition came into a context in which new possibilities for the relationship between myth and archaeology were being explored. Schliemann had been in correspondence with Newton for several years, and Newton was one of Schliemann's first contacts when planning the collection's visit to London.³²⁹ But despite being one of Schliemann's greatest supporters in London, Newton was ambivalent about Schliemann's Homeric claims. Rather than looking for the roots of Homer in ancient patterns of storytelling, Schliemann was looking for (and claimed to have found) physical evidence of the events described in the epics: the objects in his museum exhibitions were not representations of myth but relics of it. As Newton wrote in an essay on Schliemann's discoveries from Mycenae:

How much of the story of Agamemnon is really to be accepted as fact and by what test we may discriminate between that which is merely plausible fiction and that residuum of true history which can be detected under a mythic disguise in this and other Greek legends are problems as yet unsolved, notwithstanding the immense amount of erudition and subtle criticism which has been expended on them.³³⁰

³²⁹ Lesley Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 39-40.

³³⁰ Newton, *Essays on Art and Archaeology*, 249.

As far as Newton was concerned, there was not yet enough evidence to demonstrate the truth of ancient epic, but if it was to come from anywhere, archaeology held the key. Newton was not the only one to harbour such a mixture of hope and doubt, and, as we will see, Schliemann's extraordinary claims meant that his exhibition was an opportunity to discuss the nature of archaeological knowledge.

The exhibition at South Kensington was regarded as a major event - there was considerable interest from the press both in London and far beyond.³³¹ Shortly after its opening, *The Times* described it as "the principal attraction" at South Kensington and reported 14,355 visitors to South Kensington in one week, compared with an average of 8886 on the same week in previous years.³³² This was not Schliemann's first experience of displaying his finds to the public. He welcomed visitors to his excavations and seems to have received "large crowds of curious" at his house at Athens, eager to see Priam's treasure in the year of its discovery and by the next year he had invited all of Athens to verify his claims by visiting.³³³ Schliemann published a record of this display in *Atlas Trojanischer Altertümer*, which gives a general sense of his style of display and, as we will see, was probably an important part of the London display in its own right.³³⁴

By 1877 Schliemann was becoming serious about displaying his finds in museums. He donated his finds from Mycenae to Greece and, even before permanent display space in a museum was found for them, the highlights were exhibited to the public in the Athenian Bank.³³⁵ An image from *The Graphic*

³³¹ "Dr Schliemann's Relics of Troy" *North Otago Times*, March 30, 1878, accessed March 15, 2013, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=NOT18780330.2.24&cl=CL2.1878.03&e=-----10--1----0-->.

³³² "South Kensington Museum," *The Times* December 27 1877, 9.

³³³ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 11, 28.

³³⁴ D.F. Easton, "Priam's Gold: The Full Story," 226-7.

³³⁵ "Our Illustrations." *The Graphic*, June 16, 1877.

(figure 2) shows this display: an informal arrangement of trays on a single table, receiving few visitors. The fact that Schliemann could not wait for a permanent display shows how keen he was to show off his finds, and how strong the public demand was to see them. Schliemann was also trying to find a suitable place to display his finds from Hissarlik during this time, and later that year the Trojan collection went on display in the South Kensington Museum.

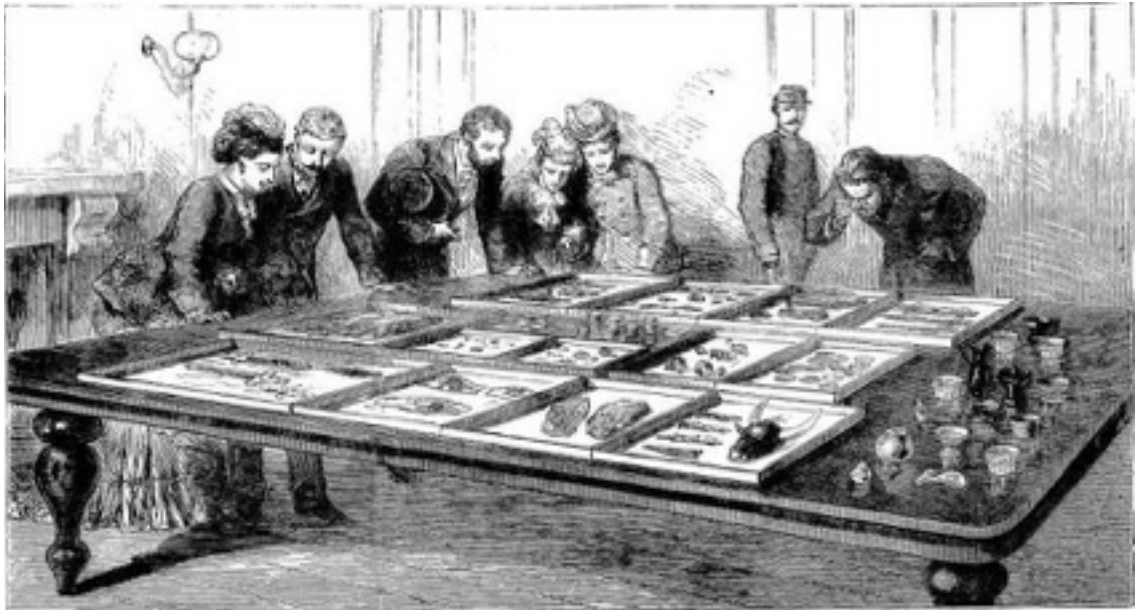


Figure 2: Schliemann's finds from Mycenae on display in the Athenian Bank.

Although it was arranged in a temporary exhibition space, the Trojan collection's time in South Kensington was one step in a series of attempts by Schliemann to find a permanent home for it. He had already tried to sell the collection to the British Museum in 1873 and frequently changed his mind about where it should go, with attempts to donate or sell it to institutions in Greece, Italy and France.³³⁶ Schliemann's exhibition of his Trojan collection at the South Kensington Museum was his first display in a public museum. As a result, it was much larger, more formal and more public than his previous displays. It opened in December 1877 and ran until 1880 when he was asked to

³³⁶ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 11; Saherwala et al. *Heinrich Schliemanns "Sammlung Trojanischer Altertumer,"* 11-18.

remove it.³³⁷ When the exhibition at South Kensington ended, the collection left for a permanent (or so Schliemann intended) home in Berlin.

Schliemann had been warmly received on his visits to London: he spoke of the “the immense interest which the enlightened English people takes in the discovery of Homeric Ilium.”³³⁸ He had influential British supporters, including former (and future) Prime Minister Gladstone and archaeologists such as Newton and Layard.³³⁹ He repeatedly described his exhibition at South Kensington as a gesture of gratitude to the British public as a whole, as well as his individual supporters. However, his reception in London was not wholly positive and he had to ask Newton to defend his work in the British press.³⁴⁰ Given his record of exhibiting his collections to the public in answer to detractors, this may have been another unspoken motivation.³⁴¹

Schliemann’s collection came to London at a time when great energy was being put into public exhibitions. Temporary exhibitions were highly popular and received a lot of official support. There was also a well established tradition of privately owned exhibitions that could be traced back to displays like William Bullock’s Egyptian Hall and the Campanari Brothers’ Etruscan exhibition.³⁴² There had been a thriving culture of large-scale international exhibitions since the Great Exhibition of 1851, which had a lasting effect on museums in London

³³⁷ Easton, “Priam’s Gold: The Full Story,” 221-243.

³³⁸ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 33.

³³⁹ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 14; “Excavations at Troy,” *The Times*, November 27, 1878, 4.

³⁴⁰ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 25.

³⁴¹ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 28.

³⁴² Susan Pearce, “William Bullock: Collections and Exhibitions at the Egyptian Hall, London 1816-25,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 20, 1 (2008): 17-35; Marcello Barbanera, “The Impossible Museum: Exhibitions of Archaeology as Reflections of Contemporary Ideologies” in *Archives, Ancestors, Practices: Archaeology in Light of Its History*, ed. Nathan Schlanger and Jarl Nordbladh (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 165-175.

and beyond. The South Kensington Museum was part of the legacy of the Great Exhibition, along with the exhibition at Sydenham.³⁴³ Temporary exhibitions accounted for a high proportion of objects on display at South Kensington in its early years.³⁴⁴ It had a primarily educational role, with a focus on educating consumers and training people involved in design and manufacture, rather than connoisseurship.³⁴⁵ Both Harrison's talks and Schliemann's exhibition need to be seen in this context - the ancient world had long been an important influence on modern taste and historical interest (whether or not the objects were deemed beautiful in their own right) was an important part of the museum's design education.³⁴⁶ The South Kensington Museum was well established by the time Schliemann's collection came to London - in fact it was in the process of expanding.

Schliemann's collection was displayed in the South Court: a large temporary exhibition space for small objects, completed in 1862 (see figures 3-4).³⁴⁷ It seems that the display was smaller and more temporary than Schliemann would have liked. He had first approached the British Museum, asking for two rooms, but ended up sharing a single large court at South Kensington.³⁴⁸ The space was divided into two by a row of columns and Schliemann's collection was

³⁴³ Kate Nichols, *Greece and Rome at the Crystal Palace, 1854-1936* (PhD diss., Birkbeck, University of London, 2009), 31, 161.

³⁴⁴ Ann Eatwell, "Borrowing from Collectors: The Role of the Loan in the Formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Its Collection (1852-1932)," *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* 20 (2000): 21-28.

³⁴⁵ A. Burton, "The Uses of the South Kensington Art Collections," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14, 1 (2002): 79-95.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁴⁷ "Architectural history of the V&A 1862-1863 The North and South Courts - a double-sided showpiece," accessed March 15, 2013, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/architectural-history-of-the-v-and-a-1862-1863-the-north-and-south-courts-a-double-sided-showpiece>.

³⁴⁸ Fitton, *Heinrich Schliemann and the British Museum*, 40.

displayed in the west side of it in the space normally reserved for loan collections of art, “under the arcade and at the south end.”³⁴⁹ It was not the only display in the court at the time, sharing the space with smaller displays of glass, pottery, metalwork (including some lent by Layard) and ecclesiastical art. The East side of the court was designated the “Oriental Courts.”³⁵⁰

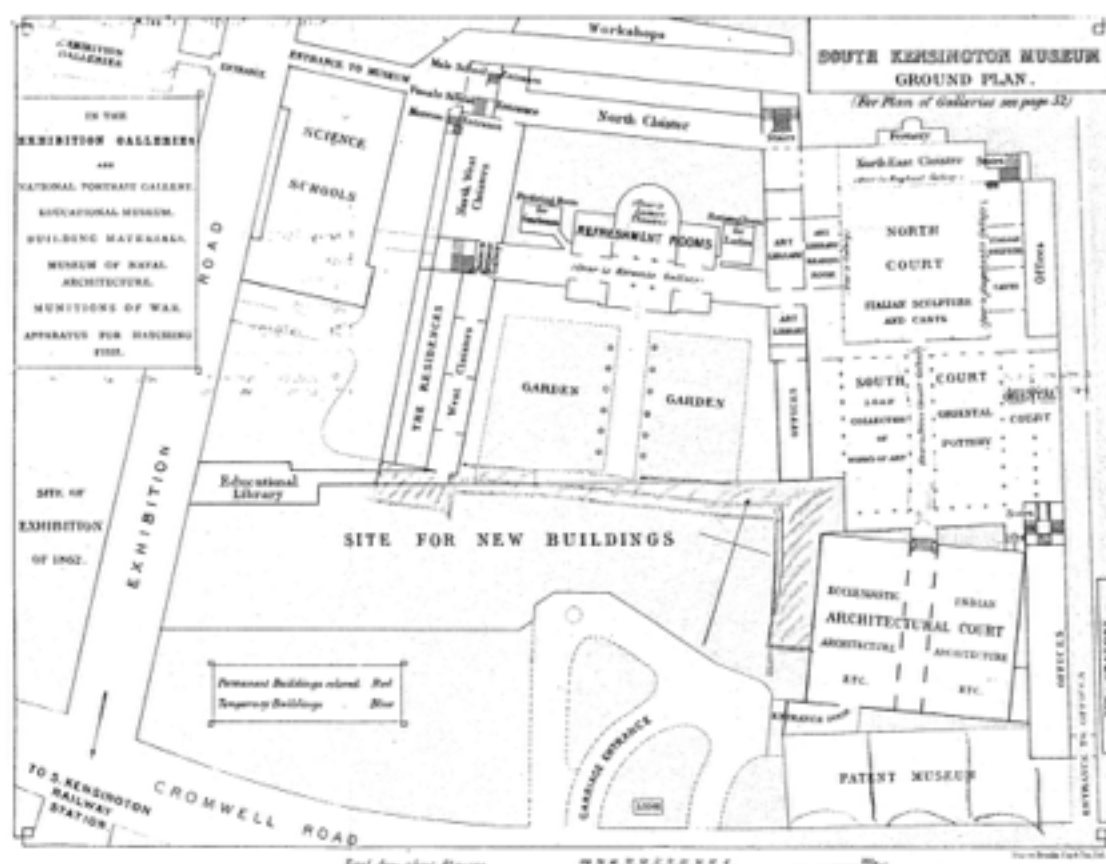


Figure 3: a map of the site of the South Kensington Museum (circa 1878) the South Court is on the centre right of the image.

Such odd juxtapositions were fairly typical of South Kensington at the time. There were Anglo-Saxon antiquities in the Persian Court and, across the road in the Exhibition galleries, one could see the National Portrait Gallery, munitions

³⁴⁹ *A Guide to the Art Collections of the South Kensington Museum: Illustrated with Plans and Wood Engravings* (London: Spottiswode & Co., circa 1878), 4, 23.

³⁵⁰ *Guide to the Art Collections*, 4, 27.

and apparatus for hatching fish.³⁵¹ Unlike the British Museum, South Kensington did not make a priority of collecting ancient material and “scrupulously avoided” classical art.³⁵² But the museum was heavily dependent on loan exhibitions at the time, whereas the British Museum did not take them.³⁵³ While today archaeology is seen as the remit of other museums in London, a visitor in 1878 would have been able to see special exhibitions of antiquities from Palestine and the collection of General Lane Fox (later known as Pitt-Rivers) as well as Schliemann’s Hissarlik finds.³⁵⁴

The quantity of material on display did mean that South Kensington was somewhat crowded. The museum’s annual report for 1878 says of Schliemann’s loan: “the extent of this collection necessitated the further crowding together of the cases in the loan court.”³⁵⁵ A comment like this in an annual report to a funding body is bound to be pointed. Overcrowding was an issue throughout the museum and it was already in the middle of a major process of redevelopment. South Kensington could have made the same excuse as the British Museum regarding available space, which shows that the Trojan exhibition was deemed worth the effort to cram into an already crowded space.

³⁵¹ *Guide to the Art Collections*, 41, 4.

³⁵² Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines*, 52-3.

³⁵³ “Rethinking Pitt Rivers: Museum displays at South Kensington Museum,” accessed March 15, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/article-index/12-articles/282-museum-displays-at-south-kensington-museum>.

³⁵⁴ *Twenty Fifth Report of the Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education* (London: 1878), 460.

³⁵⁵ *Twenty Fifth Report of the Science and Art Department*, 433.



Figure 4: an exhibition in the South Court of the South Kensington Museum, c.1876 John Watkins.³⁵⁶ The area shown is the same as in Schliemann's exhibition, and Schliemann seems to have used this case layout with a few extra cases squeezed in (compare Figure 5).

Despite this, seeing ancient and modern pottery together was a strange enough experience for *The Times* to dramatise the contrast in one of its reports on the exhibition:

The pottery in particular shows its owlsh features unabashed in the presence of the finer clay of Sèvres. It outfaces its highborn rivals, who, after all, cannot deny being its children, although in the hundredth generation the family likeness is not seen at a glance.

The spell, however, of a measurably greater age works. The public feels its power, follows the lead of the best judges in such matters, gives the

³⁵⁶ "Fig.103. The South Court, c. 1876, as depicted in an ink drawing (V&A 8089L) by John Watkins (English, died 1908)" accessed March 15, 2013, http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1159_grand_design/popup.php?img_id=197.

cold shoulder for the nonce to the daintiest faience in the world, and gravitates towards the quaint mugs, jugs, toys, pots, pans, pipkins, pitchers, often coarse-looking enough, but seldom without a certain homely grace, which have been dredged up from the depth of the hill *ubi Troia fuit*.³⁵⁷

By stressing the exhibition's appeal to both the public and the "best judges," this report emphasised the pairing of taste and popularity that was at the heart of South Kensington's work. The value of the Trojan antiquities was seen as greater than its more decorative neighbours because of its deep antiquity. The sense of inheritance was used to make this strange, ancient pottery seem more relevant to the present than their later successors. But the bits and pieces of everyday life were dignified not only by their simplicity and homely grace, but also by their famous find spot. This was underlined by the Latin tag from Ovid's *Heroides* - a reminder that a site that had been forgotten ruins, even in classical antiquity, was now known again. To work out whether this was an intentional message of the exhibition, or simply an inevitable consequence of the evocative name of Troy, we need to look more closely at the arrangement of the exhibition.

Given the care Schliemann took over his collection as a public representation of his work, it is unsurprising that he was deeply involved in the organisation of the South Kensington exhibition. Newspaper reports of the time stress that it was arranged by his own hand (although with support from the staff at South Kensington) with such care and energy that he was suffering from exhaustion when it was finished.³⁵⁸ Some of this energy seems to have gone into firing public interest before the opening - he maintained an air of mystery by

³⁵⁷ "Troy," *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

³⁵⁸ "The Trojan Treasure." *The Times*, London, December 20, 1877, 6; "Troy" *The Times*, December 6, 1877, 6.

arranging the collection behind a green baize curtain and simultaneously courted the press with promises and announcements.³⁵⁹

The exhibition was not static, and Schliemann added new material from new excavations at Hissarlik in both 1878 and 1879. He also took some objects out of the exhibition for specialist analysis. An early announcement of the exhibition already declared the need for specialists to examine the skulls and an idol “shaped out of the fossil bone of some extinct animal, which our palaeontologists will have to identify.”³⁶⁰ The loan book from South Kensington lists 16 stones, three skulls and a fragment of bone that were removed from display in 1879.³⁶¹ While Schliemann is infamous for obsessively pursuing fantastical theories, he could be just as obsessive about obtaining scientific proof for the details of his theories - he had already sent samples of the metal objects he found to multiple scientists to corroborate their composition analysis.³⁶²

As well as changing the exhibition to reflect and support ongoing research, Schliemann was also highly responsive to criticisms of the display. On December 17th, *The Times* complained of difficulty in understanding the layers of Hissarlik without a plan of the excavation, and on December 29th, “Sketches and photographs” were added to the exhibition.³⁶³ The speed with which this happened indicates that this additional interpretative material was from a pre-existing source, probably *Atlas Trojanischer Altertümer* - an album of photographs, drawings and plans which had been published only three years

³⁵⁹ “Troy” *The Times*, December 6, 1877, 6.

³⁶⁰ “Troy” *The Times*, December 6, 1877, 6.

³⁶¹ V&A archive, MA/31/7: Register of loans in, 1878-1937, 5.

³⁶² Fitton, *Heinrich Schliemann and the British Museum*, 21.

³⁶³ “Troy,” *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

V&A archive, MA/31/7: Register of loans in, 1878-1937, 5.

before.³⁶⁴ While Schliemann had long been publishing and publicising his work through photographs, it was extremely unusual (possibly unprecedented) to include photographs in museum interpretation.³⁶⁵ While museum archaeologists were keen to present collections in ways that were true to their original context, Schliemann's use of plans, photographs and other contextual information, such as the depth at which each object was found, shows an unusual commitment to relating his exhibition back to the site of Hissarlik. Schliemann was exhibiting only about five per cent of his collection: just under 4500 objects.³⁶⁶ He had attempted to ensure that this selection was representative of the collection as a whole.³⁶⁷ It seems likely that this meant picking out the best examples, rather than selecting at random. Certainly the most famous part of the collection, "Priam's treasure," was exhibited in its entirety and Schliemann took special care to ensure that "every symbolic form" would be represented.³⁶⁸ The Times published a detailed description of the contents of the exhibition. This can be used alongside other reports to give a much clearer indication of its contents than can be derived from the brief general description South Kensington Loans book.³⁶⁹ Because newspaper reports often gave case numbers and because the same case numbers can be seen on a plan of the exhibition Schliemann made to coordinate the transfer to

³⁶⁴ Heinrich Schliemann, *Atlas Trojanischer Alterthümer* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1874).

³⁶⁵ Sinclair Hood, "Schliemann's Mycenae Albums," in *Archaeology and Heinrich Schliemann. A Century After His Death Assessments and Prospects. Myth – History – Science*, ed. George Styl. Korres, Nektarios Karadimas and Georgia Flouda (Athens: Aegeus Society, 2012), 70-78, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.aegeussociety.org/en/index.php/publication/archaeology-and-heinrich-schliemann/>.

³⁶⁶ V&A archive, MA/31/7: Register of loans in, 1878-1937, 5.

³⁶⁷ "The Trojan Treasure," *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6.

³⁶⁸ "Troy," *The Times*, December 6, 1877, 6.

³⁶⁹ V&A archive, MA/31/7: Register of loans in, 1878-1937, 5.

Berlin, we can also largely reconstruct the layout of the exhibition, as seen in figure 5.³⁷⁰

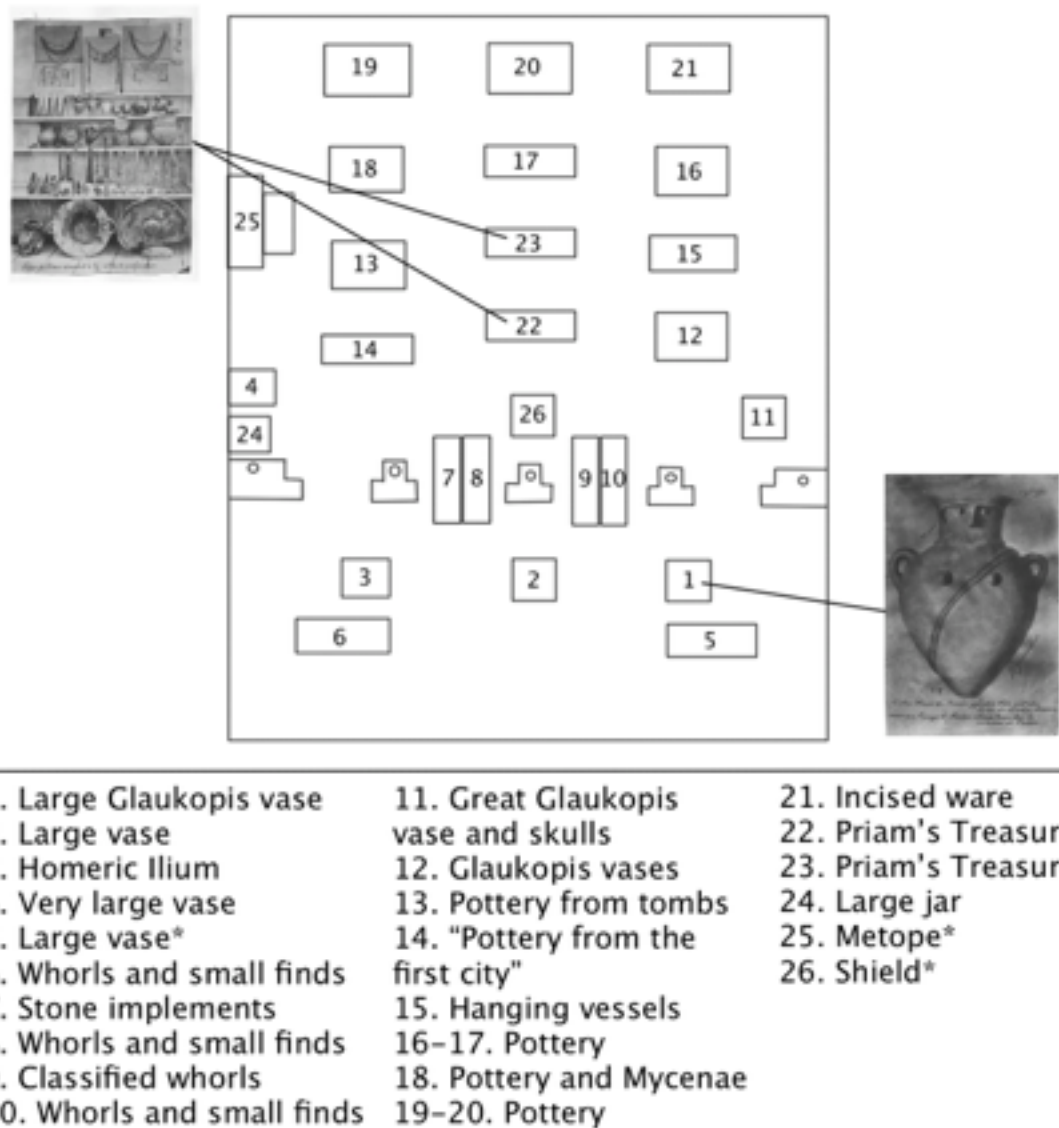


Figure 5: Plan of Schliemann's exhibition at South Kensington, based on plans sent to Berlin for reproducing it there. Cases marked with * are reconstructed from descriptions without case numbers, based on known neighbouring objects

Looking at the summary of case contents, the dominance of pottery is obvious. As one reviewer wrote: "Were there such a term as the 'clay age' in use among

³⁷⁰ Saherwala et al., *Heinrich Schliemanns "Sammlung Trojanischer Altertumer,"* 17, Abb. 5.

archaeologists, one would say that the majority of the things belonged to it."³⁷¹ Of course the reason there was so much clay is because it has been useful throughout history, as the modern pottery on display elsewhere at South Kensington showed. Remarks about its dominance owe more to expectations of archaeology fostered by big displays of monumental sculpture. Schliemann seems to have embraced this by choosing a large pot as the first object visitors saw (figure 5, case 1), by contrast, his one piece of architectural sculpture was tucked away at the far corner of the exhibition (case 25). A report from a New Zealand newspaper described the vase that visitors first encountered when entering the exhibition:

we may first observe, on our right hand, advantageously displayed in a large glass case by itself, the most important vase in the large collection of similar vessels. So important, truly, did this wonderful piece of form, triumphing by its bold defiance of ordinary proportion, seem in the sight of Dr Schliemann, that he has had it placed outside his book, under the title on the back of the cover. It is a splendid vessel of terracotta, an indescribably brilliant brown in hue, with a throat thrice the circumference of its base, the upward spring from which is noble, and consummately adapted to the poise of a majestic top-weight. Without a single feature directly borrowed from animal life, the tutelary goddess of Troy, with owl-face, a woman's breast, a necklace, and a regal belt or scarf, stands unmistakeable and authentic in poetical force of suggestion.³⁷²

For all its glowing praise, this account speaks just as clearly of the difficulties this object presented to its audience - phrases like "bold defiance of ordinary proportion" and "indescribably brilliant brown hue" show the difficulties of

³⁷¹ A.S. Murray, "Dr. Schliemann's Trojan Antiquities," *The Academy*, December 22, 1877, 581.

³⁷² "Dr Schliemann's Relics of Troy," *North Otago Times*.

interpreting a drab terracotta vessel as a cult image of Athena and its distance from conventional nineteenth-century aesthetic preferences. The reporter is right that this was an important object to Schliemann. He identified these vases with faces with an owl-headed aspect of Athena (based on a misreading of the term γλαυκῶπις) and he repeatedly foregrounded these vases in his letters to other archaeologists.³⁷³ This vase, and the other large vessels in case 1a (which may appear as 5 on the plan above) and 2 were dated to Homer's Troy in *The Times*.³⁷⁴ Alongside these was a case dedicated to "Homeric Troy" which *The Times* does not give any details about, but the *Illustrated London News* lists objects from this period including: "ivory lyres and flutes, a lion-headed sceptre-handle of fine crystal, combs of stone, terra-cotta brush-handles, copper weapons, and stone and bone implements of all kinds..."³⁷⁵

Beyond this first rank of cases were four cases, crammed between pillars, containing at least a thousand spindle whorls, as well as stone tools and other small finds. These seem somewhat unglamorous, but were central to Schliemann's theories about Troy. Spindle whorls were particularly interesting to Schliemann because many of them were engraved with patterns, and indeed the arrangement of Case 9 seems to have been an iconographic classification of these.³⁷⁶ Spindle whorls became the foundation of Schliemann's argument for the Trojans as an Aryan people because of presence of the Swastika, a symbol also found scratched into pots in Germany, which took on its modern connotations in the light of Schliemann's racial theories.³⁷⁷ Schliemann's

³⁷³ E. Meyer, "Schliemann's Letters to Max Muller in Oxford," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82, (1962): 75–105; Fitton, *Heinrich Schliemann and the British Museum*, 7.

³⁷⁴ "Troy," *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

³⁷⁵ "Dr Schliemann's Collection," *Illustrated London News*, January 29, 1877, 627-9.

³⁷⁶ "Troy." *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

³⁷⁷ Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 38-44.

theories about the stone tools he found at Hissarlik were equally radical. He found these at all depths of the site, alongside metal tools. Troy seemed to be an exception to the Three Age system as it stood (since metal should have replaced stone, not been used alongside it), and Schliemann used this to argue that the whole system was incorrect.³⁷⁸ It is unsurprising, given the importance of these unprepossessing objects to Schliemann's theories, that he made visitors walk past them to get to the treasure.

Priam's treasure was literally and conceptually central to the exhibition, occupying two cases right at its heart. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its perfect combination of evocative Homeric name and story of buried treasure, this proved the most appealing aspect of the exhibition to newspaper editors, who described it in detail and seized the opportunity to retell the story of its discovery or speculate about its ancient owners.³⁷⁹ This is also the only display from which we have labels quoted in full:

Head Dress, 'Plekté Anadesme' gold. Sixty-one chains, with idol-shaped pendants. Found at the depth of 28ft. The Trojan Treasure.³⁸⁰

At first glance, this is a simple, descriptive label. *The Times* notes how the treasure most famous as "Priam's Treasure" had been renamed: "in deference to honest and scholarly scruples, the more neutral name of the 'Trojan Treasure.'" ³⁸¹ But individual items still bore distinctly Homeric names. "Plekté Anadesme" is drawn directly from the *Iliad*, and the *Times* article that quoted this label also quoted the passage of Homer from which it was derived, and attributed the inspiration for the link between text and object to Gladstone

³⁷⁸ Fitton, *Schliemann and the British Museum*, 34-5.

³⁷⁹ "The Trojan Treasure" *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6; "Dr Schliemann's Collection," *Illustrated London News*, January 29, 1877.

³⁸⁰ "The Trojan Treasure," *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6.

³⁸¹ "The Trojan Treasure," *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6.

himself. This, alongside reports peppered with Homeric object names, shows that labels were simple but used terms derived from and suggestive of Homer.

The illustrations from *Atlas Trojanischer Altertümer* (e.g. figure 6) can give us some sense of how Schliemann might have arranged the treasure. Certainly Schliemann had strung together a lot of the small gold items, and the cases must have been similarly crowded to fit in the thousands of small items.

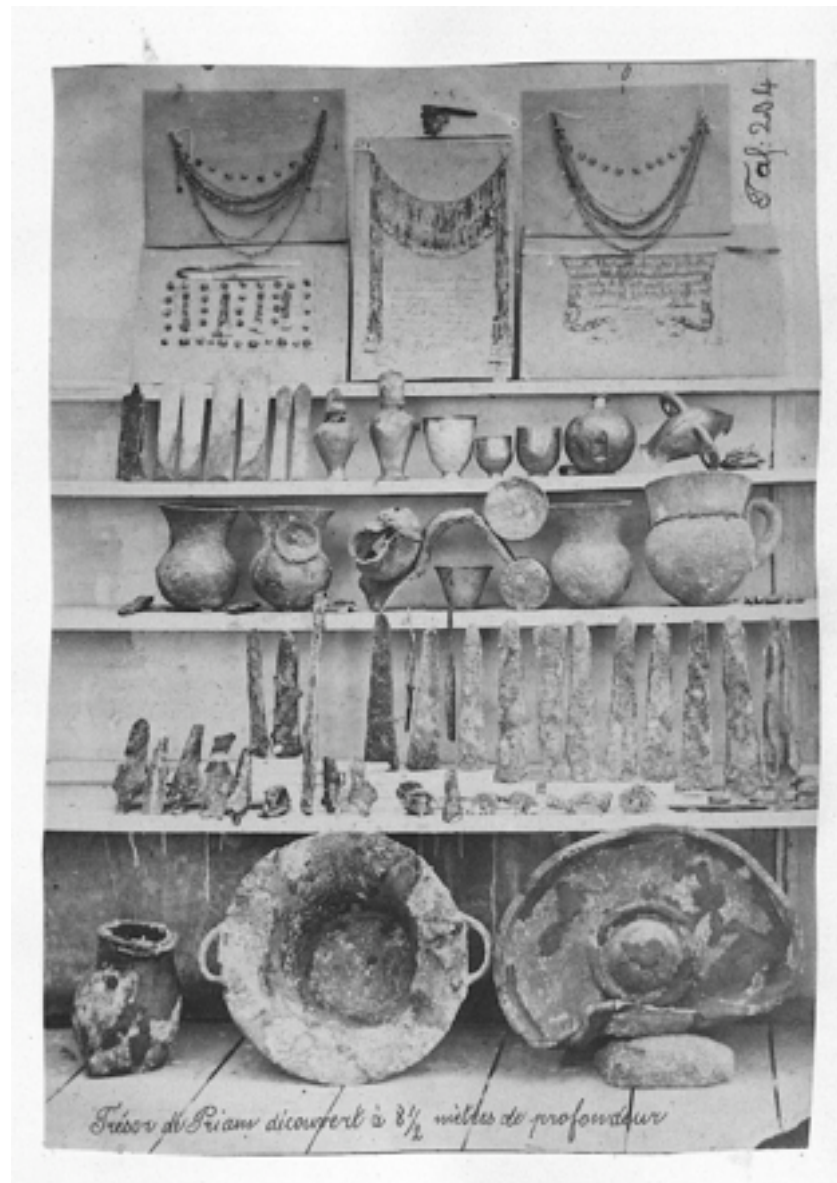


Figure 6 : part of the Trojan Treasure as illustrated in *Atlas Trojanischer Altertümer*

Beyond the treasure, the cases were all dedicated to pottery. These attracted less attention than the rest of the exhibition, but seem to also have been arranged by type, mixing all levels except for the “first city” from the bottom layer, which got its own separate case. There was a group of pottery that Schliemann thought was similar to Etruscan pottery, and a group of incised ware. Schliemann also included a few objects (“no more than eight”) from Mycenae in one of these cases, probably also pottery.³⁸²

Objects in the exhibition were grouped together largely by conceptual similarity. The Times described this arrangement:

As a general rule, each case is appropriated to antiquities of a like kind irrespective of relative ages. This principle of arrangement, it must be acknowledged, is not without its advantages. For instance, with the help of the figures affixed, wherever practicable, to show in English feet the depths whence the various objects were taken. It enables the student to compare the respective styles of manufacture and art characteristic of the successive swarms of settlers.³⁸³

This approach was novel enough to merit comment twice in the same article, the second less positive:

Ten cases out of two dozen, each filled with objects exhumed from all the Trojan strata, may well seem bewildering. Many have asked whether the strictly chronological arrangement, of course with proper subdivisions, would not have been far better than that actually adopted. Perhaps it might have been preferable on the whole. It is to be hoped that in the partial rearrangement, which, as we announced the other day, Dr. Schliemann contemplates before long, its merits may be kept in

³⁸² “The Trojan Treasure” *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6.

³⁸³ “Troy,” *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

view. On the other hand, his present method becomes more intelligible as we proceed.³⁸⁴

This frames chronology as the logical arrangement for archaeology and something that might have made Schliemann's exhibition more intelligible. Schliemann did not completely ignore dating: some of his case groupings (such as the Homeric and first city cases) were defined in temporal terms, and all objects were marked with the depths at which they were found.

This decision to indicate date by depth was in part because of the difficulties Schliemann had in fixing dates for the various layers of the ancient city.³⁸⁵ In fact, the stratigraphy and dating of Hissarlik would not be firmly established until the 1930s.³⁸⁶ Giving visitors depths instead of dates made it easier to sidestep this problem, while still foregrounding Schliemann's archaeological technique. By placing the emphasis on quantifiable depth Schliemann grounded each object in the structure of the site. This was probably intended to protect him from the accusations of lack of rigour that he experienced with his early work.³⁸⁷ Schliemann had not given up on his search for myth, but the exhibition shows repeated attempts to ground these claims in linguistic, stratigraphic and scientific evidence.

Schliemann was not alone in displaying functionally related objects from many time periods together. One major advocate for typological display was Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, who had devised a set of principles for sorting objects by type and then arranging these types to demonstrate the

³⁸⁴ "Troy" *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

³⁸⁵ "Troy" *The Times*, April 18, 1878, 7.

³⁸⁶ Fitton, *The Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age*, 158-161.

³⁸⁷ M. Lehrer, "Schliemann's Initial Views on Homer: Biographical, Literary and Touristic Origins of a Cultivated Image of Naïveté," in *Archaeology and Heinrich Schliemann. A Century After His Death* ed. Korres, Karadimas and Flouda, 365-370, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.aegeussociety.org/en/index.php/publication/archaeology-and-heinrich-schliemann/>.

evolution of technology.³⁸⁸ This approach allowed him to propound his own ideas about racial evolution and place cultures at different stages in a universal progression of technological development.³⁸⁹ His collection was displayed according to this approach in the South Kensington Museum's branch at Bethnall Green from 1874 to 1878.³⁹⁰ It is quite possible that Schliemann saw and was influenced by this collection. The two collections could be compared more closely when Pitt-Rivers' collection moved to South Kensington December 1878.³⁹¹ Compared to the Pitt-Rivers collection, which brought together ancient and modern objects from all over the world, Schliemann's collection was very limited in geographical and chronological scope. But both dealt with the stuff of everyday life and contained a large amount of material that looked primitive to nineteenth-century viewers.

We do have evidence that Pitt-Rivers visited Schliemann's exhibition: he wrote a review of it for *Nature* in 1878.³⁹² This indicates that, while the cases may have been typological, their contents were not ordered quite to his liking:

³⁸⁸ He was then known simply as General Lane Fox, but I will refer to him by Pitt-Rivers as this is the name by which he is best known today. "Typological Museums, as Exemplified by the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford, and his Provincial Museum at Farnham, Dorset," *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Dec 18, 1891, 115-122; "Rethinking Pitt-Rivers | Typological Museums," accessed March 8, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/article-index/12-articles/189-typological-museums>.

³⁸⁹ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 195-201.

³⁹⁰ "Rethinking Pitt Rivers: Museum displays at Bethnal Green Museum," accessed March 8, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/article-index/12-articles/281-museum-displays-at-bethnal-green-museum>.

³⁹¹ "Rethinking Pitt Rivers: A year in the life: 1878," accessed March 8, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/pitt-rivers-life/42-a-year-in-the-life-1878>.

³⁹² "Eastern Excavations," *Nature: a Weekly Illustrated Journal of Science*, 438, Thursday, March 21 (1878): 397-399; Although the review is anonymous, Pitt-Rivers' notes for this article are preserved in his papers: "Rethinking Pitt-Rivers | P66 Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum PR papers," accessed March 8, 2013, <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/primary-documents-index/14-general/698-p66-salisbury-and-south-wiltshire-museum-pr-papers>.

In short, the history of every form may be traced by connecting links in the specimens exhibited at South Kensington, the whole collection forms a continuous sequence which, by judicious arrangement of connected forms, is capable of demonstration, and it is to be hoped that some such arrangement may be adopted before this interesting collection leaves the place. To apply the expression "Darwinism" to such a sequence of forms is no mere figure of speech, it expresses the truth as fully in its relation to savage art and ornament as to the forms of nature.³⁹³

Schliemann's typology was clearly not a direct imitation of the Pitt-Rivers collection. Indeed, Schliemann went out of his way to challenge one of the fundamental tenets of technological evolution with his theories about stone tools. Instead, Schliemann's typology was structured around foregrounding and demonstrating his own theories about the site of Hissarlik.

It does seem that Schliemann might have taken some criticisms on board, since less than a month after Pitt-Rivers' call for rearrangement, *The Times* reported that he had come to London hoping to rearrange his exhibition. Although he had been forced to leave London again when his wife became ill, the announcement makes clear his intention to rearrange the collection on his return.³⁹⁴ It was this announcement that precipitated the hope for a chronological display, quoted from *The Times*, above. No matter how eager Schliemann was to please, he could not please everybody, and these competing calls show a press that took an interest in not only what was on display, but also how it was displayed.

One of the things that made Schliemann's collection so difficult to classify (but so interesting to debate) was its primitive strangeness. Commentators could not decide whether it made most sense as the remotest ancestor of Western culture,

³⁹³ Pitt Rivers, "Eastern Excavations," 399.

³⁹⁴ "Dr. Schliemann," *The Times*, April 12, 1878.

or in comparison to “savage” peoples of the rest of the world. This may be at the root of the confusion experienced by some visitors, since Schliemann’s collection seemed to resist conventional narratives of development:

The visitor cannot but be struck by the various stages of civilisation shown in the diverse objects apparently belonging to one period.³⁹⁵

It was not that people were unused to seeing “the various stages of civilisation,” but that Schliemann’s collection did not fit in the conventional categories.

Because of the difficulties of dating the material, no one was certain how ancient Troy related to them. For Schliemann, the Trojans were the forebears of modern Europe. Not only as Homer’s Trojans, but also as what *The Times* described (following his lead) as the “oldest known Aryan culture.”³⁹⁶

Schliemann’s theories about Trojan iconography (especially the swastika) placed Troy as the stepping stone into Europe for Indo-European culture: giving Troy a central role in fashionable linguistic and racial theories.³⁹⁷ Schliemann saw no clash between these claims and his Homeric literalism, but for one of his more vocal critics, Hissarlik’s anthropological interest was in direct conflict with the claim for it as Homeric Troy. Murray’s review of the exhibition in *The Academy* stressed that it should be of more interest to anthropologists than students of Homer:

Yet when the collection fails as a show, it begins to be interesting to the student; not, however, the student of Homer, who, should he take with him a text of the poet in the hope of obtaining illustrations of it, will find himself in a worse position than the inexperienced play-goer who takes a common version of a play which he is to see, hoping to be able to follow the actors. There is, in fact, a most signal absence of objects

³⁹⁵ “Dr Schliemann’s Collection” *Illustrated London News*, January 29, 1877, 627-9.

³⁹⁶ “The Trojan Treasure,” *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 6.

³⁹⁷ Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 38-44.

belonging to the stage of art and workmanship with which Homer was acquainted, to judge from the text we now have.

Though it is clear from the general aspect of the Hissarlik antiquities, and from the particular resemblances which exist between its most characteristic specimens and objects of antiquity found elsewhere, that the people to whom they belonged were in a primitive condition of civilisation, yet it is by no means certain that they must have lived at a very early period - say before Homer.³⁹⁸

The Times had published an article only two days before which gave line references from the *Iliad* for specific objects (like the “*Plekte Anadesme*” discussed above) so the idea of visitors carrying copies of Homer into the exhibition may have been more than empty rhetoric.³⁹⁹ For Murray, the material’s simplicity made it aesthetically wrong for Homer’s Troy and gave it a new interest as an instance of a primitive (but not necessarily very ancient) culture. This clash between the simplicity of Schliemann’s collection and his claims for its literary significance was a common enough response to the exhibition to make it worth satirising. A humorous piece on the racial characteristics of the ancient Trojans appeared in *The Builder* and was richly enough enjoyed to be reprinted repeatedly in other publications. It commented on a male skull that could be seen at South Kensington:

so extraordinarily animal in character, with its narrow receding forehead, projecting jaws, and powerful teeth (the latter almost entirely perfect), that if we are to take this as any typical specimen of the men who were engaged in the conflict about Troy, and who were the authors of much of the work exhibited here, we must come around to the

³⁹⁸ A.S. Murray, “Dr. Schliemann’s Trojan Antiquities,” 581.

³⁹⁹ “The Trojan Treasure” *The Times*, December 20, 1877.

conclusion that, in spite of the glamour thrown around them by Homer, they were, if physiological character means anything, a set of ruffians very low in the scale of existence.

Certain Homeric critics have already drawn this deduction, mainly from the peculiarly barbaric acts of Achilles and the matter-of-course manner in which they are regarded, besides the general style of the hand-to-hand combat of the Iliad. It is certainly curious to find among these relics a skull so exceedingly calculated to confirm this uncomplimentary estimate of "the heroic age."⁴⁰⁰

While racial science need not really be in conflict with reading Homer as an account of real events, reconciling the two means giving up on the idealised image of Homeric heroes and European origins that both draw on. The joke is that Homer's supposed defenders cannot really know their Homer that well if they have not noticed the violence. This joke is steeped in the debates over Schliemann's finds - even the aside about the teeth may reflect the fascination with the "thirty-two beautiful teeth" of the Mycenae "mummy."⁴⁰¹ This was not the only instance of jokes in response to the strangeness of Schliemann's finds: the *Illustrated London News* described one of the masks found at Mycenae as "extremely ugly" and observed that if Menelaus were that ugly, it was not surprising that Helen preferred Paris.⁴⁰²

Schliemann's exhibition was a great opportunity to make fun of two rich veins of European identity: classical texts and racial theories. Not least because of the hopes pinned on it as a point of origin of by both disciplines. This humorous

⁴⁰⁰ "The Heroic Age" *The Times*, January 8, 1878, 10; "Varieties." *The Leisure Hour: An Illustrated Magazine for Home Reading*, March 2, 1878, 144.

⁴⁰¹ Cathy Gere, *The Tomb of Agamemnon: Mycenae and the Search for a Hero*, (London: Profile Books, 2006), 76, 84.

⁴⁰² February 4, 1877. Reprinted in Edward Bacon ed. *The Great Archaeologists*, (London: Book club Associates, 1976), 48-49.

piece also shows how much the newspapers loved reporting on academic disagreements. It was common to report on these without particular interest in which side was correct. In a broadly sceptical evaluation of the competing claims for the site of Troy, the *Illustrated London News* acknowledged that, when encountering the “supposed Trojan relics” that some viewers might be happier with the fantasy:

It can scarcely be doubted that these were worn by royal personages; and Priam and Hecuba may have been accustomed to put them on, when they proceeded to worship at the shrine of the Palladium, while their daughters, Cassandra and others, or Helen, their fatal Greek daughter-in-law, may have been adorned with the multitude of smaller jewels. Let this interesting reflection be cherished in spite of ungenial scepticism, by the lady visitors to the South Kensington Museum, who will do well to read "the tale of Troy divine," if not in Homer's sonorous Ionic Greek, at least in the graceful English couplets of Alexander Pope, or in the masculine blank verse of the late Earl of Derby. They will like it, we promise them, quite as much as the "Idylls of the King."⁴⁰³

As in the lectures of Jane Harrison, the imaginative content of myth is seen as an appropriate way into the ancient world for ladies. This is a much more patronising version in which women must be cajoled into loving Homer because they like Tennyson and jewellery. Women here are seen as more interested in beautiful stories than objective facts, reflecting a gendered division between reason and emotion. Schliemann may have tried to show rigorous evidence for the truth behind Homer, but narrative readings of the past risked being seen as frivolous. In a time when the Homeric question raised doubts about whether Homer himself was real, let alone his characters, Schliemann seemed doomed to be met with scepticism:

⁴⁰³ “Dr Schliemann’s Excavations in the Troad” *Illustrated London News*, January 5, 1878, 11-13.

A few years ago the world was startled by the announcement that Troy, the veritable city which Priam ruled and Homer sang had been revealed. The announcement was received with incredulity by most and with ridicule by some, for even the site had been warmly disputed by many generations of scholars. *Etiam periere ruinae* had been the impatient and almost contemptuous exclamation of Mr Lowe when asked for a grant from the Exchequer in aid of explorations in the Troad, and he seemed to imply that the search would be as fruitless as if it had been proposed to look for King Arthur's sword... indeed if there were many who disbelieved in Homer altogether, there must have been more who disbelieved in the Troy which his poems described and it naturally seemed to them but the pastime of scholars or archaeologists to dispute over the site of a city which might never have existed.⁴⁰⁴

There was even an alternative textual tradition to allude to in dismissing the idea of finding Troy “*etiam periere ruinae*” comes from Lucan, describing a visit by Caesar to an utterly destroyed Troy.⁴⁰⁵ But this newspaper article depicts Schliemann as having proved empirically that such extreme scepticism was wrong. There was something there and those interested in the truth were encouraged to wait for further study to yield more answers:

...it will be a long time before the wider questions raised by the singular discovery are settled. It is so easy to say that we have here before us the very treasure of Priam, and that Homer was less of a poet and more of a historian than he has hitherto seemed; but there are more difficulties than we can attempt to enumerate to be got over before that easy and simple solution of the problem can be adopted. We must not think of Troy alone or Homer alone. We have here materials such as we

⁴⁰⁴ *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Lucan, 9.969.

have never had before for the reconstruction of the prehistoric life of the Greeks, and we need a wide induction and a comprehensive survey before we can venture to draw any conclusions at all.⁴⁰⁶

Schliemann's collection was interesting precisely because it raised as many questions as it answered; it showed the potential for future discoveries in archaeology. Suspension of disbelief and enjoyment of the possibilities allowed people to revel in the fantasy of looking at Priam's treasure, without ever fully committing to it. Sometimes this manifested in a shallow, popularised version of the past, but it also offered an archaeology of hope to those who were willing to engage more deeply. The final part of this chapter explores one of Schliemann's successors who was even more adept at using myth to capture the public imagination and stir up a sense of the possibilities of his excavations.

⁴⁰⁶ *The Times*, December 20, 1877, 9.

Knossos in London

As a fellow pioneer of Aegean prehistory, whose discoveries were inflected through ancient stories, Arthur Evans is an almost inevitable next step from Schliemann. Like Schliemann, Evans is primarily remembered for his field discoveries, but made use of exhibitions to publicise his finds and promote his theories. Evans himself seems to have been aware of these similarities. He spoke with admiration of Schliemann's discoveries in his first speech as keeper of the Ashmolean and seems to have been asked repeatedly to comment on his predecessor's work in print.⁴⁰⁷ His writings show a self-awareness about their similarities, while also showing the ambivalence that would become characteristic of later scholarship on Schliemann. This ambivalence extends to the discoveries of mythic landscapes for which both are well known:

Archaeology has perhaps little call to concern itself with the fitting on of poetical topography to altered physical conditions.⁴⁰⁸

This difficult relationship is particularly clear in Evans' museum work, which picked up on the influence of Schliemann, but did so selectively in ways that suited a much changed context and his own interests. In particular, Evans' handling of myth shows an awareness of its power in capturing the public imagination, and care to distance himself from Schliemann's claims of the literal truth of ancient stories.

⁴⁰⁷ Arthur Evans, *The Ashmolean Museum as a Home of Archaeology in Oxford: an Inaugural Lecture Given in the Ashmolean Museum, November 20, 1884*, (Oxford : Parker & Co., 1884); Arthur Evans, "Introduction," in Ludwig, *Schliemann of Troy: the Story of a Goldseeker*, 9-21; Arthur Evans, "Review: Troja: Results of the Latest Researches and Discoveries on the Site of Homer's Troy, and in the Heroic Tumuli and other Sites, made in the Year 1882," *The Academy*, December 29, 1883, 437-9.

⁴⁰⁸ Evans, "Review: Troja," 438.

Evans has long been of interest as a pioneer of Aegean prehistory and had the sort of dramatic personality that attracts fascination and criticism.⁴⁰⁹ While many of his theories about Knossos have been superseded or challenged, there has been a growing interest in the ways in which Evans' version of Minoan society was put together and the role this played in constructing a prehistory for modernity.⁴¹⁰ The version of Knossos produced by Evans has been shown to be a modern construction from the concrete walls of Knossos, through the imaginative reconstructions of wall paintings from fragments, to the forgeries that fed demand for Minoan figurines.⁴¹¹ This desire to make archaeology meaningful in the present, and the techniques Evans used to do so, have been seen as deeply bound up with museology.⁴¹²

Unlike Schliemann (who liked control over how his finds were displayed, but never worked as a curator), Evans' museum work was central to his career and self-promotion. His keepership of the Ashmolean (which he took up in 1882) was an important step in Evans' early career, both in terms of the status it gave him and its influence on his archaeological practice.⁴¹³ While he only served as keeper until 1908, the museum remained a lifelong commitment through his role as honorary keeper. Even late in his career he was actively changing the displays. His work as a curator is widely acknowledged to have transformed

⁴⁰⁹ J. Alexander MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth* (London: Pimlico, 2001); Mary Beard "Builder of Ruins," in *Confronting the Classics* (London: Profile, 2013), 17-25.

⁴¹⁰ Cathy Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*.

⁴¹¹ Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2002).

⁴¹² Andreas Lapourtas, "Arthur Evans and His Representation of the Minoan Civilisation at Knossos," *The Museum Archaeologist* 22 (1995): 71-82; Donald Preziosi, "Archaeology as Museology: Re-thinking the Minoan Past," in *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking "Minoan" Archaeology*, ed. Yannis Hamilakis (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002) 30-39.

⁴¹³ Yannis Galanakis, "Exhibiting the Minoan Past: Oxford to Knossos," in *Minoan Archaeology: Challenges and Perspectives for the 21st Century*, ed. Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, forthcoming.

the Ashmolean and had far reaching influence on the rest of his career.⁴¹⁴ As a professional curator, Evans played an important role in formalising and professionalising museum archaeology (a subject covered in more detail in the next chapter) but he also used temporary exhibitions to get both public interest and academic recognition. This final section of the chapter looks at his first temporary exhibition in London, and asks what had changed for myth in museums since Schliemann.

Evans held a temporary exhibition in 1903 at Burlington House to show off his discoveries from Knossos. He had only been digging at Knossos since 1900 but had already made dramatic finds and was keen to publicise them; not least because it was an opportunity to fundraise for the next season.⁴¹⁵ Because of limitations on export, Evans had little to display and so this first Knossos exhibition was dominated by replicas, photographs and diagrams.⁴¹⁶ Evans liked to include mounted pages from his published work in his exhibitions. Even later, when he had access to more original material, his writings were as important a part of exhibiting Knossos as its material remains.⁴¹⁷ This willingness to make such heavy use of diagrams and photographs may owe something to Schliemann's use of material from *Atlas* in his Troy exhibition, which Evans had travelled to London to see years before.⁴¹⁸

The Knossos exhibition occupied a single room of a larger exhibition otherwise dedicated to old masters at the Royal Academy (room 11 in figure 7). This

⁴¹⁴ Galanakis, "Exhibiting the Minoan Past"; Lapourtas, "Arthur Evans and His Representation of the Minoan Civilisation at Knossos."

⁴¹⁵ W. St. Chad Boscawen, "The Knossos Exhibition: The 'Oldest Masters' in the World." *Globe*, February 13, 1903.

⁴¹⁶ Galanakis, "Exhibiting the Minoan Past."

⁴¹⁷ The Ashmolean Museum Archive holds many pages of Evans' published work, still framed for display in exhibitions.

⁴¹⁸ Joan Evans, *Time and Chance: the Story of Arthur Evans and his Forebears*, (London: Longmans, Green and co., 1943), 207.

juxtaposition made a dramatic claim for Minoan art as the root of Western Art, and placed it on a par with celebrated easel paintings by artists such as Gainsborough, Constable, Rembrandt and Tintoretto.⁴¹⁹ The catalogue makes direct comparisons between Minoan art and that of later ages, including Gothic and Renaissance.⁴²⁰ The exhibition was also seen as direct inspiration for contemporary art:

Four thousand years old! To think of it makes a poor present-day painter's brain grow giddy. We noticed last week how many of our Royal Academicians came to pore over these vestiges of what may verily be called "old masters." Mr MacWhirter for one, with a look almost as of awe on his leonine Scottish face, returned again and again to study an art so unique.⁴²¹

This is all the more remarkable given that Evans had no original objects to display and depended on reproductions. This does not seem to have troubled the audience, and some reports, such as the one quoted above, describe reproductions as though they were originals. Many responses to Evans' discoveries stressed how modern Knossos seemed, and responses to this exhibition were no exception.⁴²² Given the small amount of original material and large amount of creative input from those doing the reconstructions, the exhibition had as much claim to be a display of modern art as of very ancient art.

⁴¹⁹ *Old Masters, Deceased Masters of the British School, Albert Cuyp and Palace of Knossos in Crete*, (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1903) accessed March 8, 2013, <http://www.racollection.org.uk/ixbin/indexplus?record=VOL3264>.

⁴²⁰ *Old Masters*, Royal Academy, 47, 49.

⁴²¹ *Modern Society*, January 24, 1903.

⁴²² Gere, *Knossos & the Prophets of Modernism*, 105-139.

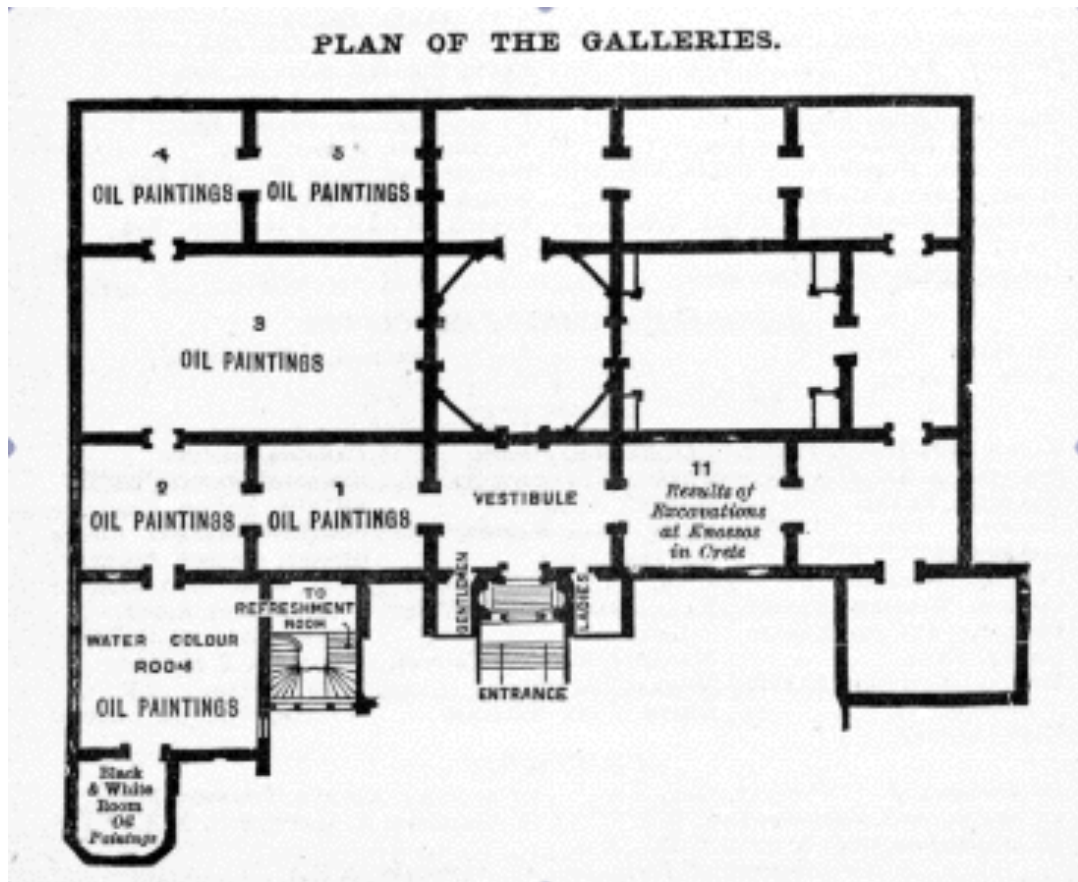


Figure 7: Plan of the Old Masters Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1903, Evans' exhibition is in room 11.

Whether seen in comparison with old masters or modern avant garde, there was no question that the exhibition was staking a claim for the Minoans as great artists. The exhibition put its most dramatic visual material straight ahead of visitors as they entered the room, including casts of the painted reliefs and of the gypsum throne. Illustrations of the Western part of the palace were shown on the left side of the room, and those from the East on the right. This arrangement reflects a desire to root the exhibition in the layout of the site, similar to Schliemann's determination to place objects within their respective strata. But this spacial ordering is also strikingly immersive, considering that this was a single room that could not hope to fully reconstruct the experience of the site and depended mostly on photographs and plans.⁴²³

⁴²³ *Old Masters*, Royal Academy, 51.

In practice, even the driest of plans could have a surprisingly vivid effect on visitors:

Nothing, however, in the collection is so pregnant with romance as the curiously unromantic map that hangs on the wall by the door. It is like a fairy tale, to be shown the ground plan of the famous labyrinth of Minos, where the Minotaur devoured his yearly tribute of seven youths and seven virgins, and whence Theseus escaped by the clue given him by Ariadne. Yet here it is, with its network of corridors...⁴²⁴

The preexisting idea of the labyrinth interacted with the complexity of the ground plan of Knossos to fuel speculation in more than one news source:

The plan which the excavations of Mr. Evans have made it possible to prepare exhibits a building which though not professedly a maze, presents in the intricacy of its corridors and chambers so complicated a series of passable and impassable compartments that a stranger wandering in its recesses might well need the help of some Ariadne's clue.⁴²⁵

The plan even led to speculation about the character of Minos:

[The palace plan] resembles one of those mazes or puzzle pictures which are devised for the amusement of children. It would have been an advantage for the ordinary visitor if the corridors, halls and approaches had been coloured, for in that way the difficulty of reaching certain chambers would be manifest at a glance. Minos had the reputation of a tyrant and it would be safer for him to be able to change his apartment whenever he pleased. There may have been degrees of inaccessibility among the rooms...Few can believe that the many-chambered dwelling

⁴²⁴ "Art: The Old Masters Exhibition at Burlington House" *Observer*, January 11, 1903.

⁴²⁵ "Knossos at Burlington House" *Builder*, January 31, 1903.

was arranged for the Minotaur...but the subtle ambages might well be taken as a confirmation of the terrible legend.⁴²⁶

This report shifts in the course of a couple of sentences from speculating about the labyrinthine quality of the plan and imagining the character of someone who might live there, before hinting that the convoluted maze might cause modern interpreters to lose their way and start believing in the Minotaur. The “subtle ambages” can stand both for the twists and turns of the labyrinth and the complexities and potential pitfalls of the evidence.

Myth was not just a temptation for sensationalist newspaper reports; and it was also used directly in the exhibition. The first words of the introduction to the Knossos room in the catalogue of the exhibition managed to cover all the famous mythical names:

Knossos, according to the legendary account, was the abode of King Minôs and the scene of the magnificent artistic achievements of his craftsman Dædalos, who moreover here built for him the mysterious Labyrinth. In its mazy depths dwelt the Minotaur - the Bull of Minôs, half bovine and half human in form - fed with the tender flesh of Athenian captives, till such time as the hero Theseus, with the aid of the clue of thread supplied by the King's daughter, Ariadnê, was able to slay the monster and lead forth the tribute children. Such, at least, was the Athenian tale...⁴²⁷

This is characteristic of Evans' use of myth: it tells the story, uses its full evocative power then problematises it. The introduction goes on to say that the myths probably contain truths about sea power, laws and artistic achievement, but this is a much more cautious approach than Schliemann's. By framing

⁴²⁶ “The Academy Winter Exhibition,” *The Architect & Contract Reporter*, January 9, 1903.

⁴²⁷ *Old Masters*, Royal Academy, 46.

traditional narratives about Knossos as the Athenians' side of the story, the guide stresses that the textual record is partial and fragmentary, while offering the hope that Archaeology might give a truer picture of Minoan life. The catalogue recognised Schliemann's importance in this context:

The underlying truth in early tradition had been vindicated by Schliemann at Troy and Mycenae; at Knossos, too, the spade alone could supply the real solution of these interesting problems.⁴²⁸

The scope for comparison with the famous and successful discoverer of prehistoric sites is something Evans embraced, and this was picked up on by the press.⁴²⁹ Evans cleverly publicised his finds by tapping into excitement about Schliemann's famous discoveries and hinting (but, unlike Schliemann, only hinting) at truths behind the myths.⁴³⁰ The Royal Academy exhibition deliberately tapped into people's expectations of and hopes for archaeology. By being less forceful with his claims about the myths, Evans gave his audience a little more freedom to imagine alternative possibilities, and the news coverage reflects this. Writers were free to find their own version of Knossos. Some chose to concentrate on the fearsome Minotaur, others on Daedalus' creativity.⁴³¹ Minos could either be a cruel tyrant or the first democrat.⁴³² By not claiming that the ancient world reflected the ancient texts precisely, Evans left more space both for scepticism and for imaginative engagement with the ancient material.

⁴²⁸ *Old Masters*, Royal Academy, 47.

⁴²⁹ "Knossos at Burlington House" *Builder*, January 31, 1903.

⁴³⁰ Susan Sherratt, "Representations of Knossos and Minoan Crete in the British, American and Continental Press 1900-1930," *Creta Antica* 10, 2 (2009): 619-49.

⁴³¹ "Art: The Old Masters Exhibition at Burlington House," *Observer*, January 11, 1903; "Knossos at Burlington House," *Builder*, January 31, 1903.

⁴³² "The Academy Winter Exhibition," *The Architect & Contract Reporter*, January 9, 1903; Boscawen, "The Knossos Exhibition: The 'Oldest Masters' in the World," *Globe*, February 13, 1903.

Evans' policy of more gentle suggestions does not seem to have limited press imagination at all, but it allowed them to cast him in the role of spoilsport rationalist:

Dismiss at once the obsession of the Minotaur from your fancy. He is a literary terror, a rhetorical figure. Mr Evans has unearthed the fresco that explains him. In all probability he was simply a bull of a large and shapely breed, which plunged and capered in some prehistoric arena for the pleasure of the Minoan Court...

Mr Evans has copied for us dumb examples of Cretan script. But he forbids us to see in them the prehistoric poems or obscure revelations.

They are the catalogues of some rich treasure houses.⁴³³

This reflects the interest in Cretan scripts which drew Arthur Evans to Knossos in the first place and which was an enduring topic of public interest.⁴³⁴ The gap between Greek literature and the ancient site, along with the frustrating illegibility of Knossos' tablets meant that literature (and its limitations) was an inevitable theme of the exhibition. Its relationship with archaeology was complicated by the awareness of how much had been lost:

If there was some Cretan Harmodius who wreathed his tyrannicide sword "in myrtle boughs," the song that told of his deed is silent. If there was some preacher of the wilderness who called this comfortable world to repentance, his protest built no churches. One turns again from Knossus to Piccadilly, doubting after all whether it be not the material half of life that is permanent. Who knows but some Cretan Horace may

⁴³³ H.N.B., "Minos in Piccadilly," *The Speaker*, January 10, 1903.

⁴³⁴ Galanakis, Yannis. "Exhibiting the Minoan Past."

have raised to himself monuments “more lasting than brass.” And yet it is the brass which lives.⁴³⁵

This reviewer shows how much of the hopes and expectations for a new archaeological discovery depended upon questions and priorities laid down by classical texts. A great society is assumed to have had its own historical figures, religious dissenters and great poets, and the loss of these is felt all the more keenly for what has been found. The fact that political and religious revolutionaries have left no trace stresses that, contrary to Evans’ suggestions in the guide book, the material record may be no more balanced than the Athenians’ old stories. The long standing dichotomy in which texts preserve the life of the mind, while objects preserve baser sensuous or practical aspects is also active here. As always, reflecting on the legacy of past societies is partially a reflection on the present. It is suggested that the Piccadilly that displays silent objects today will one day become a ruin itself - without the redeeming capacity of spiritual, political or poetic discourse. Where Evans was keen to emphasise how much could be learned about Knossos from the material record, and how Knossos should not be seen exclusively in the mould of classical literature, not all reviewers reflected this agenda. Evans had managed to sell his subject as a field in which archaeology triumphs over the study of literature but already anxieties were creeping in.

Press coverage was generally more positive about the achievements of archaeology and Evans was even thought by some to have surpassed the myth:

Who shall say that the explorer in laying bare the home of Minos, or in digging out the very birthplace of Zeus is destroying the romance of mythology? He has shown us that the beauty of life in those days, its power, its refinement, were greater than we had ever dreamt; that the age of Theseus and Ariadne was an age very like our own; that Minos

⁴³⁵ H.N.B., “Minos in Piccadilly.”

was a greater man than we knew-perhaps more rather than less likely to be the son of Zeus! And as for Daedalus, may it not be that he has achieved increase of fame, being found to be not only sculptor and inventor, but (greatest of all) architect?⁴³⁶

Newspaper coverage of both Evans' and Schliemann's exhibitions seems to have been much more interested in this "romance of mythology" than in discovering any truth behind it. Evans' approach, with its glamorous replicas and loose links to known stories seems to have been accepted much more readily than Schliemann's use of genuine (if boring) ancient objects to make claims for the literal truth of stories. Evans benefitted from being able to pick up on the pre-existing fame of Schliemann and having more visually appealing material, but his success also demonstrates a greater awareness of why the mythic narratives had captured the public imagination. Evans negotiated a relationship between myth and archaeology in which archaeology was not just about finding relics of myth, but also offered new insights into the past. This was a rhetorical coup for archaeology which allowed it to use the fame of ancient stories, without being constrained by their contents.

Archaeology as a discipline was becoming more professionalised and more "scientific," but it was hard for archaeologists and their publics to give up on imaginative engagement with the past. This was made clear in an address to the subscribers to the British School at Athens by their chairman, Cecil Smith:

Let him give one illustration of what the scientific method might become. Suppose the Grecian Urn had been bought by, say, the Museum of Berlin. To the poet's eye it was:-

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,

⁴³⁶ "Knossos at Burlington House" *Builder*, January 31, 1903.

...with brede

Of marble men and maidens overwrought,

With forest branches and the trodden weed."

How would the scientific archaeologist describe it? "Marble vase (Krater)- Much chipped; obverse, man pursuing woman; reverse, sacrificial scene."⁴³⁷

There is an obvious dig at the Germans here, which got a good laugh, but the speech seems also to have been a plea for greater subjectivity in experiencing and communicating archaeology, even as scientific methods were becoming more advanced:

...But they might, he thought, legitimately ask the countrymen of Walter Pater that they should relax (where it could with decency be done) the austere repression of their emotions; that their writings might at least cheer if they did not inebriate.

The motion was agreed to.⁴³⁸

Evans was present at the meeting, and it seems likely that the success of his recent exhibition inspired this call for archaeologists "to make their work attractive to the wider public."⁴³⁹ There was a fear that something might be lost in a completely scientific approach to the past and museums, as a site where archaeology was communicated, were at the heart of this.

It would be easy to read this as kicking back against a trend towards dry objectivity. But the mention of Pater makes this more complicated. Pater wrote

⁴³⁷ "Archaeology and Art," *The Times*, October 26, 1910.

⁴³⁸ "Archaeology and Art," *The Times*, October 26, 1910.

⁴³⁹ "Archaeology and Art," *The Times*, October 26, 1910.

of Greek sculpture in modern museums as being presented in “threefold isolation” from other arts, from the architecture it was made for, and from the “clear Greek skies and poetical Greek life.” But he also described understanding of Greek sculpture as skewed by the tendency to contextualise it through literature:

Approaching it with full information concerning what may be called the inner life of the Greeks, their modes of thought and sentiment amply recorded in the writings of the Greek poets and philosophers, but with no lively impressions of that mere craftsman's world of which so little has remained, students of antiquity have for the most part interpreted the creations of Greek sculpture, rather as elements in a sequence of abstract ideas, as embodiments, in a sort of petrified language, of pure thoughts, and as interesting mainly in connexion with the development of Greek intellect, than as elements of a sequence in the material order, as results of a designed and skilful dealing of accomplished fingers with precious forms of matter for the delight of the eyes.⁴⁴⁰

Pater was a perfect representation of the approach to Greek archaeology and myth that we have seen in this chapter. Like Newton, Pater challenged the separation of decorative arts from high art, as well as the separation of myth from everyday life.⁴⁴¹ He shared Harrison's interest in craft values, her holistic approach and her emphasis on Homer as a key to understanding Greek art.⁴⁴² He also drew directly on Schliemann's discoveries at Troy and Mycenae, using both their Homeric resonances and the fact that most of the finds were small objects that did not fit easily into the category of “art” as it existed at the time. He represented an approach to archaeology which embraced the aesthetic,

⁴⁴⁰ Walter Pater, “The Heroic Age of Greek Art,” in *Greek Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 196.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁴² Evangelista, “Lessons in Greek Art.”

imaginative, emotional and mythic elements of the past. As we have seen, this was a major feature of the museum world at the end of the nineteenth century. But Smith's address to the subscribers to the British School at Athens expresses fear that the benefits of this approach in seeing and communicating a fuller sense of the ancient object might be lost.

The emotional and imaginative aspects of understanding the past are easily overlooked if the history of archaeology is presented as a constant progress towards greater empiricism. Looking at museums' approaches to myth allows us to see issues that were important at the time, but have since (as Smith feared) been somewhat forgotten. Objects were now challenging the old dichotomy of intellectual and material which had traditionally been used to devalue them in relation to literature. They could now speak for the intellectual content of the past but, according to Pater, they had lost something of their materiality in the process.

Despite several attempts to fit mythic narratives into the intellectual framework of archaeology, the fashion for them passed. The next chapter looks at a different aspect of this clash between nineteenth- and twentieth-century archaeology by asking which ancient narratives were now acceptable in permanent displays of museum archaeology, and what happened when objects with older, less acceptable narratives attached were donated to museums.

4. Collecting stories

Much had changed in archaeology between the beginning and the end of the nineteenth century. The previous chapter ended on a note of anxiety from members of a discipline that was striving to become more focused and objective. This chapter looks closer at what museums had lost and gained from the new disciplinary approaches and priorities available to them. It will explore what the development of archaeology as a modern discipline meant for museums by looking at one of their most fundamental activities: collecting. The development of archaeology as a modern discipline played out as much in institutional as epistemological terms, with universities and museums at its forefront. This chapter looks at the legacy of these changes for the day-to-day functioning of museums - in this case, the Fitzwilliam Museum - and asks whether there was any place for ancient narratives in these processes.

While understanding collecting is of fundamental importance to the study of museums, it is also studied as an important social phenomenon in its own right. As a result, there is a literature on the subject nearly as diverse as the range of collections themselves. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to reflect on the many ways that ancient texts have made ancient objects meaningful to collectors. Rather, this chapter hopes to show the wider context in which museums operate and explore how personal or outdated approaches that might otherwise be alien to museums have nevertheless shaped their collections. We have seen how, by the late nineteenth century, archaeology had come to pride itself on its ability to understand pasts with no written history and classical texts were seen as symptomatic of old approaches to material. This chapter shows the enduring power of obsolete approaches by looking at how gifts from private collections forced curators to confront these older values. It will consider what happens when a museum conserves an object, but remakes the object's story.

Histories of museums tend to focus on high profile acquisitions that were actively pursued. Looking at the self-conscious, directed aspects of collecting is an obvious way to understand the collector's motivations and approaches, but it is important to remember that the majority of objects in museums come from more minor gifts and that these also shape the character of a collection.⁴⁴³ This chapter considers a few case studies from the large amount of material that the Fitzwilliam acquired as gifts. It aims to explore a major influence on museums and to recognise some of the different relationships, resources and motivations that have shaped them. In doing so, it hopes to resist the teleology that can be difficult to avoid when talking about the bringing together of disparate objects into a coherent collection.

University museums offer a particularly interesting case study for this: their context means that they are close to the cutting edge of archaeological research and feel obliged to display their collections accordingly.⁴⁴⁴ Curators understood what a world class collection was and strove for completeness, but in practice found themselves constrained by limited access to material. Antiquities laws prevented the removal of the sort of aesthetically pleasing and archaeologically important material that museums wanted and curators found themselves unable to compete with larger institutions when opportunities to buy such material occurred.⁴⁴⁵

I want to show that collecting, even in the form of unsolicited gifts, is never passive. The museum responded to offers with research and debate. This forms the grounds for acquisition or refusal, but it also establishes the object's place in

⁴⁴³ Susan Pearce, *On collecting*, 407.

⁴⁴⁴ Henry S. Kim, "Crossing Cultures: Redefining a University Museum," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 52 (2007): 44–50.

⁴⁴⁵ C.L. Cooper, "The Antiquities Department Takes Shape: The Fitzwilliam in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the History of Collections* 24, 3 (2011): 347–367.

the museum - sometimes literally as well as conceptually. The museum's research about new acquisitions is often preserved in museum archives. It can show us the range of objects that was available to a particular museum, what seemed particularly appealing or unappealing and why.

In this chapter, I will begin by considering what university museums saw as their remit, comparing the Fitzwilliam with some similar institutions both within and beyond Cambridge. I will then go on to look at how these aspirations shaped practice through three case studies. I will begin by comparing two objects that were arguably the most welcome and unwelcome gifts offered to the Fitzwilliam antiquities department: a marble head in the style of Polyclitus and a bronze nail, supposedly from Caligula's barge. While these differ in many ways, they offer particularly rich examples of the acceptable and unacceptable use of literary material to understand museum objects. The last section of the chapter will then go on to look at a more problematic object: a gold diadem from Ithaca that was considered desirable but turned out not to be authentic. It looks at how the museums' investigations into the diadem were framed by twentieth-century models of authenticity and how these could fail because of an inability to grasp the imaginative engagement with Greece that created the diadem.

The role and aspirations of the Fitzwilliam

The range of different (and often conflicting) influences on museums as institutions can make it difficult to pin down their aims.⁴⁴⁶ This chapter cannot hope to give a full sense of the institution's priorities, but it is important to understand the major influences on the collecting decisions of the Fitzwilliam Museum antiquities department, what it saw as its remit and what it hoped to achieve through collecting. In a time before clearly framed mission statements, this is not a straightforward task, but such motivations can be seen in the decisions the museum makes and staff comments about the museum, both in private and in public. Museums' identities are often created in relation to others that they emulate, complement or compete with and this is a particularly useful tack in Cambridge, with its three museums that collect archaeological material as well as its longstanding competition with Oxford.

The closest thing that the Fitzwilliam Museum had to a statement of purpose was the stipulation in Viscount Fitzwilliam's 1815 will that his collection was to be used "for promoting the increase of learning and the other great objects of that noble foundation."⁴⁴⁷ This frames the founding bequest as something to serve the university's purposes and should probably be seen in light of the fact that there had been a university museum in Oxford since 1683. But the will does not seem to have offered much guidance in terms of new acquisitions or other practical decisions; indeed, it deliberately left the future course of the museum

⁴⁴⁶ Ivan Karp, et al. ed. *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴⁷ John Willis Clark ed., *Endowments of the University of Cambridge* (London: C.J. Clay and Sons, 1904), 486-88.

in the hands of the university. Its mandate to promote “the increase of learning” could be useful as a tactic when justifying specific educational aims.⁴⁴⁸

While its beginnings were deliberately flexible, the role of Fitzwilliam Museum was later complicated by the creation of other museums within the university, including competing collections of archaeological material. In 1884 its plaster casts split away, along with the university’s ethnological and local archaeological collections to form the Museum of Classical and General Archaeology. This in turn split in 1911 and subsequently the Fitzwilliam, the Museum of Classical Archaeology and the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (later Anthropology) all actively collected archaeological material. These splits themselves represent categories of material that are deemed worthy of collecting, but excluded from the Fitzwilliam. This has rightly been seen as an important process of defining disciplinary boundaries, and one that shows up some of the contradictions and competing interests within the disciplines.⁴⁴⁹ These issues were not resolved with the creation of new museums and each time there was uncertainty or disagreement over where an object should go, the museums were forced to reflect on and articulate their particular slant on archaeology and redefine their boundaries.

In practice, the first museum which was offered the material (most often the Fitzwilliam, as the highest profile museum) got first refusal. The museums often seem to have redistributed material amongst themselves to find a better fit. So, for example, Archaeology and Ethnology sent its classical vases on a long

⁴⁴⁸ See for example: Robert Willis, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge, and of the Colleges of Cambridge and Eton* vol. III (London: Cambridge University Press, 1886), 224; Sir Charles Waldstein, *Catalogue of Casts in the Museum of Classical Archaeology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), iv.

⁴⁴⁹ Mary Beard “Casts and cast-offs: the origins of the museum of classical archaeology,” 1-29.

term loan to the Fitzwilliam in 1939 and eventually transferred them in 1952.⁴⁵⁰ In return, the Fitzwilliam redirected pottery from Palestine and from India to Archaeology and Ethnology.⁴⁵¹ These redistributions were largely to do with the source of the material - the Fitzwilliam's archaeology collections were dominated by Greek, Roman and Egyptian material, and these were seen as its specialism.⁴⁵² But these categories were not as clearly defined as they might first appear. For example, most local material ended up at Archaeology and Anthropology, but the Fitzwilliam would happily take material of exceptional quality.⁴⁵³ More surprisingly, even though the Fitzwilliam had ejected its plaster casts, as late as 1948 they were seriously thinking of acquiring a cast of the Chatsworth Head, perhaps to replace the original which the museum had been loaned in the thirties.⁴⁵⁴

The real reason why an object might be deemed to belong in the Fitzwilliam Museum was quality. While limiting the sources of material collected to Greece, Rome and Egypt may itself have been a judgement of the quality of their products, objects that had been collected were not necessarily safe. For example, after a long period of reorganisation, the museum's Cypriot collections were largely transferred to Classical Archaeology. The main criteria used seem to have been aesthetic. Archaeological considerations were also in play and care was taken to keep everything published in *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, but

⁴⁵⁰ Letter from Carl Winter to Winifred Lamb, August 3, 1952. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 210.

⁴⁵¹ Letter from Geoffrey to Carl Winter, November 21, 1954. and Draft letter Louis Clarke to Master of Trinity Hall, December 1941. Fitzwilliam Archive, Envelope 1042.

⁴⁵² *Report to the Council of the Senate by the Committee Appointed by Minute 504 of 9 May 1949 to Consider the Matters raised in the Director's Letter Dated 15 March 1949*, Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 2414.

⁴⁵³ Lucilla Burn, "The Dam Hill Bronzes," *Journal of the History of Collections* 24, 3 (2011): 399-415.

⁴⁵⁴ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, December 13, 1948. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 540; A.J.B. Wace, "The Chatsworth Head." *Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies* 58, 1 (1938): 90-95.

objects from the same tomb were not kept together, something the keeper later regretted.⁴⁵⁵ In 1949 when it became apparent that the Museum of Classical Archaeology would have a new building, the Fitzwilliam eagerly considered transferring “less interesting stone and marble sculpture and other objects in the Greek and Roman Department which are not strictly speaking works of art.”⁴⁵⁶ Again, care was taken not to lose objects that had been or might be published. A memo about a subsequent reorganisation in 1957 succinctly shows why these decisions were so fraught with difficulty:

The removal of objects which have little artistic value to places where they could be studied by students but would not spoil the general effect would give a valuable increase of space.⁴⁵⁷

The museum was very aware of its need to serve two publics within a limited space: specialist researchers and general visitors. General visitors were expected to experience the material aesthetically, while the students were expected to engage intellectually. Objects without an aesthetic appeal not only required a different approach, but they also appealed to a different group and ran the risk of spoiling the aesthetic enjoyment of other objects. They were less public objects.

In Cambridge, this problem was largely managed by relegating this more specialised kind of archaeological material to more specialised museums, but the Fitzwilliam was aware of alternative approaches, particularly that taken in Oxford. As the major museums of two competing institutions with similar collections, comparisons between the Ashmolean and the Fitzwilliam often

⁴⁵⁵ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, May 12, 1949. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 801.

⁴⁵⁶ Letter from Carl Winter to Winifred Lamb, May 6, 1949. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 801.

⁴⁵⁷ *Memorandum on the Greek and Roman Department*, November 23, 1957. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 337.

seem inevitable. Such comparisons also seem to have been important for the museums themselves.⁴⁵⁸ For example, a report ordered by the Cambridge University Senate in 1949 to consider the Fitzwilliam's current practice and future direction included an extensive appendix comparing the two museums. This confirms the emphasis on the aesthetic that we have already seen, describing it as the main feature that distinguishes the two:

An aesthetic bias is...inherent in a Museum founded upon the private collection of one of the great eighteenth-century dilettanti and built up since chiefly by the taste and generosity of individual connoisseurs. It would now be difficult, even if it were desirable, to change in the character of the Fitzwilliam this radical quality, to which it owes much of its attraction and reputation... The situation at Oxford is quite different. The Ashmolean is one of the most ancient museums in Europe. It was founded towards the end of the seventeenth century, not long after the Royal Society, and with a somewhat similar impulse. Besides some works of art, its original collections consisted of antiquities, curiosities, objects of natural history, botanical specimens, and so on. It began with and has continued to show a strong archaeological and antiquarian bent, which has governed its growth, though the Ashmolean also has become a great repository of objects chiefly of aesthetic interest.⁴⁵⁹

This document emphasises the differences between the two museums based on their founding collections, seeing the two museums as heirs of very different collecting traditions. It describes the Ashmolean's emphasis on archaeology as

⁴⁵⁸ C.L. Cooper, "The Antiquities Department Takes Shape."

⁴⁵⁹ *Report to the Council of the Senate by the Committee Appointed by Minute 504 of 9 May 1949 to Consider the Matters Raised in the Director's Letter Dated 15 March 1949*, Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 2414.

an inheritance from its antiquarian roots. Correspondingly, the Fitzwilliam's archaeological collections were less central to its remit:

While the Museum includes some important mediaeval antiquities, it largely excludes (except in the Greek and Roman and the Egyptian departments) objects primarily of archaeological, antiquarian or ethnological interest.⁴⁶⁰

The department of Greek and Roman antiquities was an exception to the rule that could collect material without aesthetic interest. But when it did so, it was acting outside the remit of the museum as a whole.

The Ashmolean also looked to its roots in antiquarianism as a reason for its particularly archaeological bent. Arthur Evans called it the "The earliest home of archaeology in England."⁴⁶¹ However, it is important to note that the Ashmolean had not always been thought of as the more "archaeological" of the two. In 1881 Greville J. Chester (who had also catalogued the Ashmolean's Egyptian collections) described the state of the archaeological collections in Oxford as "wretched" and "far behind Cambridge."⁴⁶² Evans' 1884 inaugural lecture as keeper of the Ashmolean addressed many of the concerns raised by Chester about the consolidation and organisation of the archaeology collections.

Evans' inaugural speech echoes the relationship between archaeology and text that we saw in the previous chapter and anticipates his approach to Knossos. While lip service was paid to the importance of classical texts, archaeology's great strength was to extend knowledge beyond them:

⁴⁶⁰ *Report to the Council of the Senate by the Committee Appointed by Minute 504 of 9 May 1949 to Consider the Matters Raised in the Director's Letter Dated 15 March 1949*, Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 2414.

⁴⁶¹ Sir Arthur Evans *The Ashmolean as a Home of Archaeology in Oxford*, 5.

⁴⁶² Greville J. Chester, *Notes on the Present and Future of the Archaeological Collections of the University of Oxford* (London, Simpkin Marshall and Co., 1881), 12.

the Treasury of Atreus may be an empty name, and to walk the halls of Priam or to place upon our brows the diadem of Helen, may still for aught we know be an idle fancy. Yet something tangible remains. Who... can doubt for a moment the Oriental source from whence one and all of them were derived?...What we might expect from language now stands revealed to us in bodily shape by the inexorable Science of the Spade.⁴⁶³

This line of thinking stresses its distance from some of the more earnest responses to Schliemann's work that we have seen, but still evokes the resonances of myth. This talk of deep time, foreign influence and scientific approaches seems far from the Fitzwilliam's focus on the aesthetic and high classical. Indeed, his successful overhauling of the museum along archaeological lines may be at the root of the Fitzwilliam's defensive refusal to compete in these terms fifty years later. Certainly the Fitzwilliam seems to have watched his work with interest and in the early 1900s some in the university were anxious to find a curator to make similar changes in Cambridge:

They did not want eminent men only. The eminent man was not sufficient. They wanted a curator, they wanted a man who would always be on the look out for increasing the actual objects in the museum, just as was the case with Dr Arthur Evans at the Ashmolean Museum. He (Prof. Ridgeway) drafted that part of the report in the express hope that they would get a man who would occupy a good part of his time in going hunting for objects for the University, and that time would be credited to him.⁴⁶⁴

The Fitzwilliam did eventually get a more active curator of antiquities, although perhaps not the man Ridgeway had imagined.

⁴⁶³ Sir Arthur Evans *The Ashmolean as a Home of Archaeology*, 16.

⁴⁶⁴ Fitzwilliam Syndicate Papers, Cambridge Collection bequeathed by John Willis Clark formerly of Trinity College. University Library Camb.907.1.

Despite the Fitzwilliam's discomfort in the face of the Ashmolean's "scientific" approach to Archaeology, by 1920 it had an honorary keeper of antiquities with excellent credentials in this field. Winifred Lamb was regularly involved in fieldwork but also took an active role in organising and extending the collections.⁴⁶⁵ Like Evans, her primary interests were prehistoric and she wrote hopefully of the power of archaeology to reach beyond the scope of the written record:

When archaeology shall have produced sufficient material to supplement tradition, we may be able to write its [i.e. Bronze Age] history.⁴⁶⁶

As with Evans' inaugural, archaeology appears at first glance to be "the humble handmaid of a book-written history"⁴⁶⁷ but both represent a bid by archaeologists to expand the concept of history into an approach to the past that can include material as well as textual evidence. This was a particularly useful line of reasoning for prehistorians and museum professionals in arguing for the importance of their work.

Lamb took the opportunity of a new space becoming available in 1921 to reflect her interests.⁴⁶⁸ The new gallery (variously called the archaic and the prehistoric gallery) focused on early material. The fact that the new acquisitions case was in this gallery may show that this time period was a priority for expanding the

⁴⁶⁵ David W. J. Gill, "'A Rich and Promising Site': Winifred Lamb (1894-1963), Kusura and Anatolian Archaeology." *Anatolian Studies* 50 (2000): 1; "Winifred Lamb and the Fitzwilliam Museum" *Classics in 19th and 20th Century Cambridge: Curriculum, Culture and Community* (1999): 135-156.

⁴⁶⁶ Winifred Lamb, *Greek and Roman Bronzes* (London: Methuen, 1929), 30.

⁴⁶⁷ Sir Arthur Evans *The Ashmolean as a Home of Archaeology*, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ Gill, "Winifred Lamb and the Fitzwilliam Museum," 135- 156.

collections.⁴⁶⁹ However this gallery was not exclusively prehistoric and archaic, and objects that did not fit its ostensible remit (including the Roman copy of a classical statue head discussed in the next section of this chapter) were put proudly on display there.⁴⁷⁰ Beyond the partition (and so beyond Lamb's territory) the room's old function as a study room was still evident, with books and paintings visible, (figure 8).



Figure 8: The new archaic/prehistory gallery in 1924, photograph scanned from Fitzwilliam Museum antiquities department records.

This display reflects a spirit of compromise that seems to have pervaded Lamb's work for the Fitzwilliam:

⁴⁶⁹ Letter from Carl Winter to Winifred Lamb, May 21, 1951. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 337.

⁴⁷⁰ Memo, "The Marble Head," 1951. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32.

I am concentrating on Anatolian prehistory & could not write a good catalogue on classical Greek antiquities... When I was first made Keeper, I put all my enthusiasm into improving the Department. You with your high standards of what is good and what is indifferent will understand my feeling that I don't want to go on when I'm no longer giving my best, but only what I can spare from other preoccupations. It strikes a false note.⁴⁷¹

There are three such attempts to resign by Lamb in the Fitzwilliam archives. In fact, she lasted in the post until 1958.⁴⁷² But this does show the distance between Lamb's museum work and the rest of her archaeological career and the gulf this represents between the objects of contemporary study and the objects considered desirable for museum display.

⁴⁷¹ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, January 12, 1951. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 337.

⁴⁷² The other failed attempt was in 1944. Letter from Winifred Lamb to Louis Clarke, January 19, 1944. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive envelope 540; Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, August 8, 1958. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive envelope 338.

Desirable and undesirable

Desire plays an important part in histories of collecting and, in general, the most desirable objects are the most fruitful ones for histories of museum collections, since more thought goes into evaluating, researching and displaying them. This section looks at two very different objects from opposite ends of this spectrum: a much-admired marble statue head and a bronze nail that no one really wanted, but was accepted as a gift anyway. While I am not the first to point out the contrast between these two extremes of the gifts, I want to explore what these two objects can tell us about the value systems operating within and beyond the Fitzwilliam.⁴⁷³ In particular, since both can trace their value back to nineteenth-century private collecting and value systems derived from ancient texts, they offer a glimpse of changing approaches to the past.

The Roman marble head in the style of Polyclitus was given by Lady D'Abernon in 1948. It was received with considerable excitement. Lamb called it "the kind of acquisition that we have always dreamed of at the Fitzwilliam."⁴⁷⁴ The museum's director, Carl Winter later said it was "one of the most admired objects in our Greek and Roman collection and gives great pleasure to our visitors."⁴⁷⁵ It was so well received because it offered the intellectual appeal and classical status favoured by the museum and was also validated by contemporary intellectual approaches. It was identified as a copy of the same statue as the Westmacott Athlete in the British Museum. The British Museum's statue was, in turn, identified with a statue of Kyniskos of Mantinea

⁴⁷³ The two are briefly mentioned in Gill, "Winifred Lamb and the Fitzwilliam Museum," 148.

⁴⁷⁴ Quoted in Letter from Carl Winter to the Master of Trinity Hall, November 20, 1948. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32.

⁴⁷⁵ Letter from Carl Winter to the Lady D'Abernon, October 8, 1952. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32.

by the foot placement on a statue base. While the base did not name the artist, Pausanias ascribed the statue of Kyniskos he saw to Polyclitus.⁴⁷⁶



Figure 9: The marble head of a Polyclitan athlete, donated by Lady D'Abernon in 1948.

We have seen throughout this thesis how attributions to named artists increased the value of a work of art, but for a long time there was no systematic method for doing this. In practice, very little surviving ancient sculpture could be linked to named artists. By the nineteenth century, there was a growing awareness that many surviving statues were Roman copies of Greek originals, offering the possibility that these copies could be identified with specific famous artists and

⁴⁷⁶ For the Fitzwilliam's research on the object, see notes in Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32; For a succinct account of the reasons for this identification, see Palagia and Pollitt ed., *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture*, 77-9.

used to understand what the originals might have been like. In 1893, Adolf Furtwängler published *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik* which (while it was not the first attempt at stylistic attribution) set out a comprehensive approach for identifying the styles of ancient Greek artists, which was picked up by many others.⁴⁷⁷ While this approach was based on close stylistic analysis and has been seen as a rejection of philological approaches to art, it still depended heavily on the famous names and scraps of information about them found in ancient literature.⁴⁷⁸

The Fitzwilliam's Polyclitan head illustrates how the value systems for identification of sculptors had been refined and formalised into a discipline that used ancient texts but no longer drew its prestige from them alone. In fact, although the attribution to Polyclitus was ultimately derived from a mention in Pausanias, the Fitzwilliam's research made no mention of the texts at all.⁴⁷⁹ Instead, it relied on a well established disciplinary framework surrounding identifications of statues, based on comparisons with similar objects and close stylistic analysis, as well as the authority of acknowledged experts such as Furtwängler and Strong.⁴⁸⁰

The head was not only identifiable with the British Museum's version, but had been described by Strong in a 1904 exhibition catalogue as a "closer, more faithful copy of the original than is the Westmacott athlete." This idea that it was a closer copy was, of course, not a result of direct comparison with the original, but by comparison with other copies assigned to Polyclitus. This shows how important this system of identifications was in museums' value

⁴⁷⁷ Palagia and Pollitt ed., *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture*, 1-15.

⁴⁷⁸ Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 123-138.

⁴⁷⁹ Pausanias, 6.4.11.

⁴⁸⁰ Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32.

systems - it not only allowed objects to be seen as copies of originals by famous sculptors, but also allowed for judgements to be made about their quality as copies. In this case, *Kopienkritik* was working in the Fitzwilliam's favour. Their head was seen as a first rate object able to compete with the most important collections, a major aim for the antiquities department.⁴⁸¹

It is telling that Lamb emulated the display style of the British Museum's recently completed Duveen gallery in displaying the head - cutting edge display was deemed necessary for a piece of sculpture with a claim to international significance.⁴⁸² This was a single object, not a massive new gallery so the similarities with the Duveen gallery were limited. In practice this emulation meant an isolated position with a low pedestal to allow students to examine the head closely. Thus the emphasis on close, stylistic examination that identified and gave value to the head was also embedded in plans for displaying it. But this was not just an approach designed to appeal to specialists. The Duveen gallery was a prominent example of a display in which aesthetic concerns had triumphed over historical ones. The Fitzwilliam antiquities department was able to look to it as a model for display which both reflected their academic approaches and was also a good fit for the priorities of the museum as a whole. Emulating the British Museum's display may also have been a way of acknowledging the work and preferences of its former owner, since Lord D'Abernon had been a close friend of Duveen and deeply involved in planning the gallery.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Letter from Lamb to Winter, November 12, 1957. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 338.

⁴⁸² Undated memo on display. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 32.

⁴⁸³ Elisabeth Kehoe, "'Working Hard at Giving it Away': Lord Duveen, the British Museum and the Elgin Marbles," *Historical Research* 77, 198 (November 2004): 503-519.

Keeping valued donors happy may also have been the reason the museum acquired an unassuming piece of bronze with no real archaeological or aesthetic value in 1947. It was described as an “Enormous bronze nail, reputed to have come from Caligula’s barge” and its exciting sounding source was undoubtedly the main reason for it having been valued and kept by the Tharp family who donated it.⁴⁸⁴ This dramatic claim does not seem to have been taken very seriously by anyone, let alone the museum staff. It was politely managed with the word “reputedly” by staff and donors alike.⁴⁸⁵ The keeper of antiquities, Winifred Lamb, certainly made her desires clear in a letter to the director “I do NOT want an IMMENSE BRONZE NAIL.”⁴⁸⁶ The director responded that “The nail, though immense, is lovely. I hope you will want it.”⁴⁸⁷ The exchange has a sense of humour that is typical of letters between the two, but (since the nail *was* ultimately acquired) also shows Winter’s ability to overrule Lamb.⁴⁸⁸ It was rare for Winter to do this and, given that the nail hardly fitted with the museum’s aesthetic priorities either, it is more remarkable that the nail was acquired than that its acquisition was opposed.

The nail seems to have been offered as an afterthought along with the gift of a Bronze age sword. The letter that offered the sword mentioned that “the anthropological museum have always wanted it” and so the Fitzwilliam may have been unwilling to pass on the nail to them (as was usual practice with

⁴⁸⁴ Carl Winter in a postscript to a letter to Winifred Lamb. 23 October 1947, Fitz 540

⁴⁸⁵ Letter from Carl Winter to Mrs Tharp, October 10, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 777.

⁴⁸⁶ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, undated (from a series written in October 1947). Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 540.

⁴⁸⁷ Letter from Carl Winter to Winifred Lamb, October 27, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 540.

⁴⁸⁸ Cooper, “The Antiquities Department Takes Shape,” 1–21.

such material) in case the sword went with it.⁴⁸⁹ However, the nail also carried an emotional significance that made it harder to refuse. The two objects were donated to commemorate two members of the family who had recently died.⁴⁹⁰ The museum seems to have made considerable allowances for the family's wishes, even letting them suggest their own labels.⁴⁹¹ These labels gave basic information about each object and its find spot but, unsurprisingly, stressed the donation's commemorative function.⁴⁹² In one sense this is a far cry from the emphasis on aesthetic and scholarly value in the Polyclitan head's display. But in both cases the museum staff took considerable care to reflect the reasons for the acquisition in display.

While it is difficult to imagine the nail being kept, let alone offered to the museum, without its backstory, no one seems to have taken it very seriously. It was not known (and nobody seems to have asked) which member of the family brought it back from Italy, or how and when it was acquired in the first place. The association of such an ordinary object with a well-known figure from antiquity seems faintly ridiculous, and curators were well aware of the past demand for objects associated with Roman emperors. For example, the Fitzwilliam itself owned a modern portrait of Nero, with a false provenance tailored to appeal to collectors of ancient art.⁴⁹³ But the nail's provenance was not completely implausible: Nemi was an important stop on the Grand Tour

⁴⁸⁹ Letter from Mrs Tharp to Carl Winter, October 20, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 540.

⁴⁹⁰ Letter from Mrs Tharp to Carl Winter, October 20, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 540.

⁴⁹¹ Letter from Mrs Tharp to Carl Winter, December 27, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 777.

⁴⁹² Letter from Mrs Tharp to Carl Winter, December 14, 1947. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 777.

⁴⁹³ Adolf Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), 266.

because of its significance in Roman poetry and history.⁴⁹⁴ Caligula's name was linked to the site through Suetonius, who mentions him hiring someone to depose its priest-king as one of a list of the emperor's outrages.⁴⁹⁵ But there was a much more tangible link between site and emperor through the ships that this nail claimed to have come from.

While the ships at Nemi were not excavated until 1930, parts of the ships and their contents (including nails in a range of sizes and materials) had repeatedly been removed from them since at least the fifteenth century.⁴⁹⁶ This material included pipes bearing Caligula's name which inevitably coloured the interpretation of the ships with suggestions of violence and orgies.⁴⁹⁷ The nail could never have had the sort of detailed contextual information that makes such objects interesting to archaeologists, but its story might have gained more depth if it had been of more interest to the keeper. Certainly Lamb's successor, when publishing antiquities loaned to the museum in 1970, raised the possibility that a statue of Asclepius found at Nemi could be linked to the barges, despite lack of evidence to connect them.⁴⁹⁸ An evocative story was nothing without an evocative object to accompany it.

⁴⁹⁴ Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bigamini ed. *Grand Tour: The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1996) 23, 163.

⁴⁹⁵ Suet. *Calig.* 35.3.

⁴⁹⁶ Thomas Ashby, "Archaeological Discoveries in Italy and the Mediterranean during 1930," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 23, (1933): 1-13; Rodolfo Lanciani, "The Mysterious Wreck of Nemi" *The North American Review* 162, 471 (1896): 225-234.

⁴⁹⁷ Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, "A Day at Lake Nemi," *The Classical Journal* 11, 5 (1916): 285-292.

⁴⁹⁸ R. V. Nicholls, "The Trinity College Collection and Other Recent Loans at the Fitzwilliam Museum," *Archaeological Reports* 17 (1970-1971): 77-85.

A knotty problem

In 1953 the Fitzwilliam Museum was given a piece of Hellenistic gold jewellery that came to be referred to by staff as “the Ithaca Jewel.” This was a thin, knot-shaped piece of gold, decorated with applied gold wire and set with red stones. It was a Heracles knot shape (sometimes described as a “Gordian knot” by staff) and as part of either a girdle or a diadem. Like the bronze nail discussed in the previous section, it came from a private donor and was probably originally acquired from nineteenth-century travellers. It was also linked to a site with compelling ancient literary associations. Unlike the nail, it was the sort of object the museum wanted to collect and its provenance seemed much more watertight - apparently discovered by a named individual who published an account of it. The only problem was that the Ithaca jewel was a fake.



Figure 10: The Ithaca Jewel - a nineteenth century forgery of a Hellenistic gold diadem.

In this section, I will give a brief account of the Fitzwilliam’s convoluted investigation into their Ithaca jewel. I will then explore the travellers’ accounts and other relevant accounts that can shed light on the history and meaning of

the jewel and the genuine ancient diadem which it imitated. Looking at two important moments on the jewel's path to becoming a museum object shows two very different approaches to the ancient past and raises the question of whether professionalized museums can ever be free of the legacies of nineteenth-century traveller-collectors. The way in which a genuine account (albeit containing imaginative engagement with myth) was attached to a forgery offers a particularly rich case study for the role of stories (fact, fiction and somewhere in between) in establishing authenticity and what authenticity has meant at different times.

Scholarship on the Fitzwilliam Museum and its place in broader Cambridge collecting has been particularly interested in forgeries acquired and other kinds of material deemed inauthentic.⁴⁹⁹ It seems unlikely that the Fitzwilliam Museum was much worse than others in this respect although, given how circumspect museums can be about forgeries, it would be difficult to prove this either way. This could simply be a question of the available material: objects that raise doubts have more detailed records in archives, since there tends to be more to say in a debate than a consensus. However, this interest also reflects a wider shift in scholarship on fakes in recent years, moving from a focus on uncovering deception to one which sees forgeries as evidence of contemporary desires and tastes.⁵⁰⁰

The issue of forgeries does seem to have been a particular concern for the Fitzwilliam. In 1957, Lamb wrote:

⁴⁹⁹ Kevin Butcher and David W. J. Gill, "The Director, the Dealer, the Goddess, and Her Champions: The Acquisition of the Fitzwilliam Goddess," *American Journal of Archaeology* 97, 3 (July 1993): 383; Mary Beard, "Casts and Cast-offs"; J. Dawson and T. Emmett, "'Plaguey Things': The History and Technical Examination of Two 'Etruscan Bronze' Statuettes in the Fitzwilliam Museum," *Journal of the History of Collections* (May 2, 2012): 1–20.

⁵⁰⁰ Mark Jones ed., *Why Fakes Matter: Essays on Problems of Authenticity* (London: British Museum Press, 1992), 7–10.

Personally I have been daunted by the state of the Gk. Antiquities market for many decades. Really first class things would be either from private collections or smuggled from recent illicit diggings: the latter are 'off', the former are extremely few now. And the great snag is that practically no important work of Gk art has been bought by any museum for a long time without a challenger who says it's a forgery.⁵⁰¹

At this time, there were growing worries about the Ithaca jewel and well-established and well-publicised doubts over the Fitzwilliam Goddess (a forged Minoan sculpture).⁵⁰² These must have been fresh in Lamb's mind, but there was also a wider problem at stake. The museum was still expected to collect actively, but antiquities laws and a competitive market made this harder to do. The ability to detect forgeries was a crucial part of museum curators' professional identity - enough so for the Museums Association to dedicate both the keynote of its conference and an exhibition to the issue in its 1952.⁵⁰³ The Museum Association saw this as an age-old problem, expressed a grudging respect for successful forgers but hoped that the growing range of scientific techniques might eliminate it. There was also some prestige to be had in spotting forgeries, as one contributor to the story of the Ithaca jewel put it, "There is nothing which art historians enjoy more than discovering fakes in other people's collections."⁵⁰⁴

In many ways, the Ithaca jewel was a low-stakes forgery: as a private gift, the museum did not pay any money for it and it could do little harm to their

⁵⁰¹ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Carl Winter, November 22, 1957. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 338.

⁵⁰² Kevin Butcher and David W. J. Gill. "The Director, the Dealer, the Goddess, and Her Champions."

⁵⁰³ H.J. Plenderleith, "Fakes and Forgeries in Museums," *Museums Journal* 52 (1952): 143-148.

⁵⁰⁴ Letter from Graham to Richard Nicholls, April 10, 1959. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

reputation. The fact that considerable effort was expended in trying to clear its name anyway shows the museum's commitment to ideas of authenticity regardless of sunk costs. We have already seen the importance to the museum of a model of authenticity that focused on close examination of objects, from laboratory-based analysis to old-fashioned connoisseurship. But this model had no place for validation through ancient texts. I want to argue that these texts had been a crucial part of forming a very different sort of authenticity in the nineteenth century, to such an extent that forgeries and modifications from the previous century could not be understood (and so were missed) by twentieth-century curators.

Cutting the knot

The Ithaca jewel's purported discoverer likened its form to the Gordian knot. What started as a suitably ancient-sounding description of a knot with no discernible ends came to be used by Martin Robertson as a metaphor for the difficulties in untangling the evidence about its origins. When he made this comparison, Robertson betrayed not only an exasperation at the complexity of the problem, but also an unwillingness to "cut the knot" by dismissing the Ithaca jewel as a forgery.⁵⁰⁵ This unwillingness, shared by the museum for many years, left a long trail of investigation into the object's past, now kept in a dossier in the antiquities department. These investigations began almost as soon as it was acquired, although there is no indication that doubts were raised during the acquisition process.

Robertson saw the museum's announcement of the acquisition in the end of year report and wrote to the museum asking about the piece and drawing their attention to accounts of the discovery in 1812 and a subsequent appearance in a Sotheby's sale in 1939.⁵⁰⁶ Robertson was a professor at University College London who had excavated at Ithaca and maintained an interest in gold work from this region, publishing additional thoughts on it in 1955.⁵⁰⁷ He pointed out that the discoverer, John Lee, had added a fake Greek inscription to the jewel and asked whether this nineteenth-century inscription was still visible. As well as gently warning the jewel's new owners not to trust the inscription, it seems to also represent a genuine interest: he asks whether it is visible twice in the same short letter. This seems to have inadvertently raised the first concerns

⁵⁰⁵ Letter from C.M. Robertson to W. Lamb, April 21, 1955. Fitzwilliam Archive, Envelope 338.

⁵⁰⁶ Letter from Robertson to Winter. June 17, 1954. Fitzwilliam Archive, Envelope 884; John Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands in the Year 1812," *Archaeologia* XXXIII (1848): 36-54; O.M. Baron von Stackelberg, *Die Graeber der Hellenen* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1837).

⁵⁰⁷ Martin Robertson, "Gold Ornaments from Crete and Ithaca," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 50 (1955): 37.

about the jewel: the Fitzwilliam's jewel did have a faint inscription but it was impossible to construe it as the "ΣΑΦΦΟΥ ΛΑΟΔΑΜΙΑΣ" in Lee's account. The Fitzwilliam's earliest memo on the subject reads it as "ΤΗΣ ΠΙΑΕΙΑΣ," interpreted as a name, although this cannot have been particularly clear, since there are variant readings in other memos and it came to be read later as "in friendship," ΤΗΣ ΦΙΛΕΙΑΣ. By offering information about a new acquisition, Robertson had inadvertently raised more questions than he answered.



Figure 11: Detail of the back of the Ithaca jewel, showing the inscription.

The museum's main source of information about the Ithaca Jewel before Robertson's letter was a document that was donated with it, deemed genuine because of its nineteenth-century watermark.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸ Letter from Richard Nicholls to Miss Alexander, 24 April 1959. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

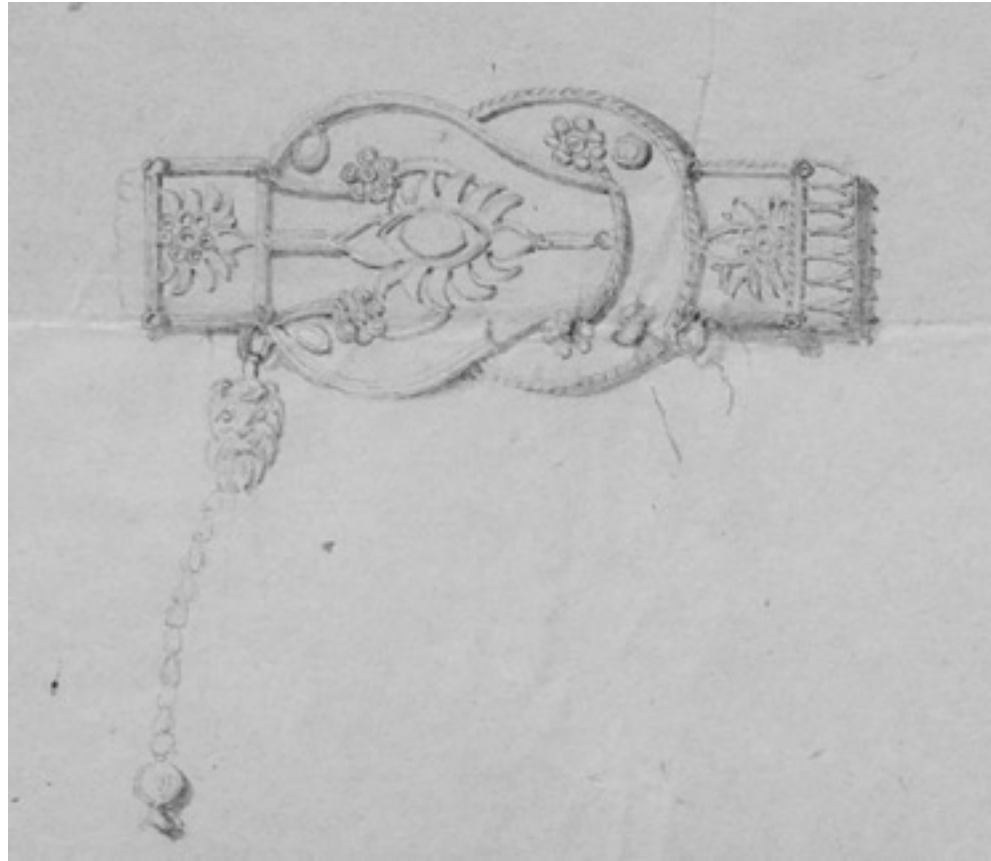


Figure 12. Sketch of the Ithaca jewel from the accompanying document

On it was a pencil sketch of the jewel (figure 12), a sketch of a ring in the margin and the following description and account of its provenance:

Excavated in the island of Ithaca by J Fiott Esq. Travelling Fellow of the University of Cambridge and at present in the possession of J Foster Architect of Liverpool.

The above [i.e. figure 12] was found with several other gold and silver antiquities of the ancient City. It appears to have formed the centre of a Female Tunic as part of the belt was also found. It is of gold and appears to represent a Gordian knot. The plate is of one piece of gold and has evidently been stamped and afterwards enriched with fine gold filigree ornaments, accompanied with 5 cut rubies. From the lower part are suspended two heads supposed to represent Centaurs, from the beards

of which are suspended 3 gold chains to each of which is attached a Pomme Granate.

The Pommegranate is honoured and esteemed in Athens as the emblem of good fortune, to this day similar gold chains are also made at present on the opposite coast of Albania similar...to be found on a tile belonging to Mr Fauvel at Athens⁵⁰⁹

John Fiott was soon shown to be the John Lee who described the jewel in *Archaeologia* in 1848. He took his uncle's name, Lee, in 1816.⁵¹⁰ The reference to Fauvel's collection also fits well with this context, since it was a popular attraction for travellers to Greece at this time.⁵¹¹ But there were also discrepancies between the two accounts. For a start, the illustrations did not match: the mounting of the central jewel appeared a lot larger in the Fitzwilliam piece, the chains were constructed differently and attached in different places. The report in *Archaeologia* describes the stones as garnets (not rubies) and the pendants are described as poppy heads (not pomegranates). All could be the result of mistakes in one or both descriptions or sketches but there were other reasons to believe that there might be two Ithaca jewels.

⁵⁰⁹ File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵¹⁰ John Venn and J.A. Venn ed., *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. II part II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 498.

⁵¹¹ Christoph W. Clairmont, *Fauvel: the First Archaeologist in Athens and his Philhellenic Correspondents* (Zürich: Akanthus, 2007), 14.

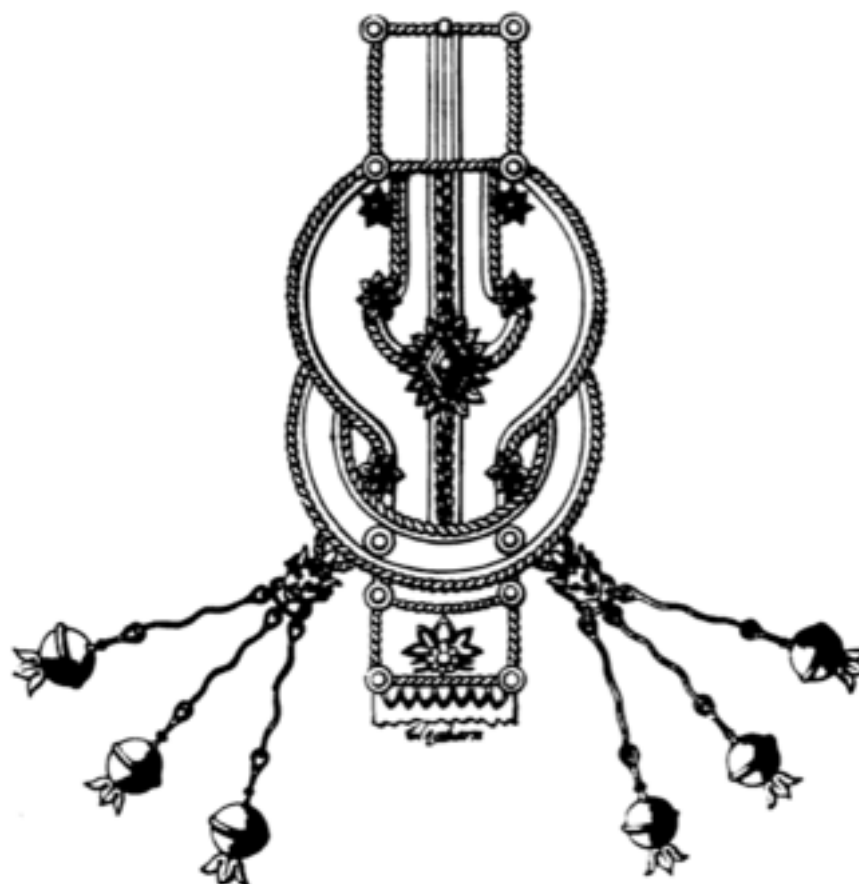


Figure 13. The illustration of the knot diadem from Lee's account of his excavations in *Archaeologia* (probably copying a sketch by Stackelberg⁵¹²)

The Fitzwilliam was aware of a sale in 1939 which included a knot shaped piece of gold supposedly found on Ithaca by Lee.⁵¹³ This looked superficially very similar to the Fitzwilliam piece but, on closer inspection, did not match theirs. While the provenance claimed was the same, they knew that this sale had happened after Mrs Acworth had acquired their diadem and close examination of the Sotheby's catalogue had established that the other version looked more like the one illustrated by Stackelberg's own book than theirs.⁵¹⁴ Stackelberg's illustration differed again in its details both from the Fitzwilliam sketch and

⁵¹² Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 45.

⁵¹³ Memo by Norman Rayner, June 19, 1954. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵¹⁴ Letter from Winifred Lamb to Jack Goodison, undated. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 884.

even from Lee's illustration, (supposedly based on one by Stackelberg) showing that what passed as "exact drawings" in the nineteenth century might not suffice for the needs of the twentieth-century museum.⁵¹⁵ Many of Stackelberg's drawings were destroyed or damaged when he was captured by pirates in 1813, which may account for the discrepancies between published versions.⁵¹⁶



Figure 14. The illustration in Stackelberg's *Die Gräber der Hellenen*, different again.

⁵¹⁵ Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 45.

⁵¹⁶ Suzanne L Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton, 1996), 52; William Turner, *Journal of a Tour in the Levant*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1820), 428-9; Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 36-54.

The museum was first offered the diadem found in Ithaca by Lee for sale in 1942 by Charles Seltman, acting as an agent for Mrs Trotter.⁵¹⁷ There are no details in the archive about why it was refused, but Seltman had a record of asking high prices for dubious antiquities and may not have been trusted in this instance.⁵¹⁸ Seltman still had access to the jewel to include it in an exhibition he organised in 1946.⁵¹⁹ The catalogue entry for this references the *Archaeologia* account of its discovery, but gives the wrong date (1915 - evidently a misprint). D. L. Davis was listed as the owner. A similar exhibition held at the Fitzwilliam in 1944 had many pieces of jewellery lent by Davis, but not this piece.⁵²⁰

Davis eventually contacted the Fitzwilliam after he saw its Ithaca jewel in the 1959 *Treasures of Cambridge* exhibition at Goldsmith's Hall in London.⁵²¹ The exhibition catalogue made only very modest claims about the object, with no reference to its reported provenance beyond the island where it was found: "420. Clasp in form of a Herakles-knot, gold set with garnets *Fitzwilliam Museum* (GR.1.1953) L 25/8 in. From Ithaca. Perhaps part of a diadem. 3rd cy B.C. Presented by Mrs M.W. Acworth."⁵²² Davis' objections were on stylistic grounds, based on the close material similarities between the Fitzwilliam's Ithaca jewel and the one that had been in his own collection until recently. He did not mince his words, accusing the Fitzwilliam of displaying a modern forgery and threatening the involvement of its recent purchasers: the

⁵¹⁷ Letter from Richard Nicholls to Mr Davis, April 30, 1959 File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵¹⁸ Butcher and Gill, "The Director, the Dealer, the Goddess, and Her Champions," 383.

⁵¹⁹ Jacqueline Chittenden and Charles Seltman, *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue of an Exhibition Held in 1946 at the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), 43.

⁵²⁰ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*. (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1944), 34-35.

⁵²¹ Letter from Graham to Richard Nicholls, April 10, 1959. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵²² *Treasures of Cambridge* (London: Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, 1959).

Metropolitan Museum in New York.⁵²³ His vehemence is probably because of the risks to the reputation of his own collection - while his Ithaca jewel was already sold, he was still trying to sell other parts of his collection. He even used his approach to the Fitzwilliam to offer them the ring that accompanied the diadem.⁵²⁴

It seemed that the Fitzwilliam had finally tracked down the other diadem. Because of this new information, and in the light of Davis' accusations, the investigation into the piece stepped up. The Fitzwilliam had not given up on its own version (although it acknowledged that it was of lesser quality) and hoped to produce a joint publication about the two.⁵²⁵ In this process it became clear that there had also been a manuscript accompanying the version now in the Metropolitan:

Objects of Antiquity found in Ithaca 1815.

On the West side of the island are the remains of an ancient building, now called the palaocastro of Aeto, which according to the local tradition was the Castle of Ulysses.

Among the ruins of the wall was found the rude seal which is evidently of remote antiquity. In a tomb near to the wall, on the outside, were found the female ornament, of worked gold... and the gold ring, with the bone of part of a thumb, still within it.

[crossed out lightly, vertically]These were sent to me from Ithaca by General Ja[superscript s] Campbell in 1815

⁵²³ Letter from Graham to Richard Nicholls, April 10, 1959. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵²⁴ Letter from Richard Nicholls to David Davis, November 23, 1960. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵²⁵ Letter from Richard Nicholls to David Davis, April 30, 1959. File on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

From this note, it is clear that these two objects that claimed to be the same one are accompanied by considerably different descriptions. While it is unsurprising that two separate objects would be owned by different collectors, it is harder to reconcile the other details. The site Lee excavated at Aito had been referred to as the palace of Ulysses by Gell, whose book Lee does seem to have used as a guide to the island, however Lee was less keen on stressing this identification. The document on the Metropolitan piece says that it was found with a crude seal, which Robertson thought was the bird-shaped one from the same sale, now in the British Museum.⁵²⁷ Lee's account makes no mention of such a seal. Finally, the hardest detail to reconcile of all is the date: Lee's gives a discovery date of 1812, whereas the document that accompanied the Metropolitan jewel gives a date of 1815. This is listed as the date the objects were received by Bunbury, and it may have simply been assumed that they had been found in the same year; if so, the facts of its discovery had either been forgotten or effaced. These subtly different claims transform the meaning of the object - not least because of its evocative connections with the palace of Ulysses. To make sense of them, we will need a deeper examination of the context in which one piece was found and the other created.

So far I have mostly looked at the process of finding out the history of the Ithaca jewel that can be traced in the museum's archive. It shows museum professionals engaged in something superficially very similar to reception studies. Provenance research has long forced scholars to confront the opinions and motivations of those who have gone before, but in service of understanding

⁵²⁶ Letter from file on GR.1.1953, Fitzwilliam Museum.

⁵²⁷ C. M. Robertson to W. Lamb 21 April, 1955. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 884; "British Museum collections database: seal," accessed March 8, 2013, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectId=462188&partId=1.

the value and meaning of a specific object, rather than for broader reflection on the role of the past. Once the mystery of the whereabouts of the other diadem was solved, and the Fitzwilliam's Ithaca jewel was established as a modern copy beyond a shadow of a doubt (it uses drawn wire and rubies, neither of which were available to Hellenistic artisans), there was little reason for the museum to pursue the questions that remained. It re-emerged briefly with the growing academic interest in forgeries in an exhibition of forgeries in 1999.⁵²⁸ The final part of this chapter asks what we can learn from the Ithaca jewel if we move away from the preoccupation with authenticity that drove the search for its provenance and, to an extent, its later interest as a fake.

⁵²⁸ *Ancient Imitations: Forgeries and Facsimiles from Antiquity* [exhibition] the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Octagon Gallery, 3 August - 7 November 1999.

Unravelling the context

Both jewels claim the same excavator, known as John Fiott or John Lee. He was a fellow of Cambridge University, appointed Worts Travelling Bachelor in 1807.⁵²⁹ He visited Ithaca on his way back from Egypt and the Holy Land. He was known to have acquired a valuable collection of antiquities on his travels, although his main collecting interest was scientific instruments.⁵³⁰ Today he is much more remembered for his scientific leanings: he was a founding member of the Royal Astronomical Society and has a crater of the moon named after him.⁵³¹

Lee presented his finds from Ithaca (not including the jewel) and an account of his travels to the Society of Antiquaries in 1848 and his account was published in *Archaeologia* in 1849.⁵³² This was nearly 40 years after the events, but provides considerable detail. In many ways it is typical of travellers' accounts of the time: he describes visiting local notables, viewing natural and man-made features of the land and the difficulties and discoveries encountered when conducting an excavation. The account covers only part of Lee's travels, including Zante, Cephalonia, Samos and Ithaca. The latter receives the most attention in his account and seems to have been his main aim at the time: he even cut short his time on Samos to avoid the risk of bad weather on the crossing to Ithaca.⁵³³

Lee's travels can also be explored through the writings of his fellow travellers, although information about him can be difficult to trace because of his 1816

⁵²⁹ Venn and Venn ed., *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, vol. II part II, 498.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ "International Astronomical Union Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature, *Gazetteer of Planetary Nomenclature*," Last accessed March 8, 2013, <http://planetarynames.wr.usgs.gov/Feature/3328>.

⁵³² *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London* vol. 1, (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1849) 263-4.

⁵³³ Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 36-54.

name change and because of the scope for variant spellings of his name. For example, Byron mentions him in one of his letters:

Here also are Messrs. Fyott, Cockerell and Forster, all of whom I know, and they are all vastly amicable and accomplished.⁵³⁴

By Forster he probably means John Foster, who was a close friend of Cockerell's.⁵³⁵ If this is the case, Byron's letter places Lee in Athens in 1811, in the company of two members of the group that excavated at Aegina and Bassae. The group referred to itself by a range of names including "the society of travellers" "the friends" and "the proprietors."⁵³⁶

We know that Lee was not alone in Ithaca. He mentions travelling with another Englishman and later being joined by several other friends who had stayed behind in Cephalonia. Five people (not including labourers) must have been involved in the excavations, since the discoveries were ultimately split five ways.⁵³⁷ The only one of his companions named by Lee is Baron Otto Magnus von Stackelberg, who was also part of the Society of Travellers, and it is possible that other members of the group were also involved. If so, this might explain why Foster was recorded as the "architect of Liverpool" who owned the Fitzwilliam's diadem in its accompanying manuscript.

Another individual who is likely to have been involved, whether as an excavator or an interested outsider, is Thomas Smart Hughes. While neither explicitly mentions travelling with the other for this portion of their journey, both Lee and Smart Hughes seem to have visited Zante at about the same time

⁵³⁴ Quoted in Frederick A. Cooper, *The Temple of Apollo Bassitas Vol 1*, (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1996), 14.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵³⁷ John Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 38, 40.

and to have seen many of the same sights and local inhabitants.⁵³⁸ Smart Hughes' account includes a detailed list of Lee's finds, apparently based on Lee's own notes.⁵³⁹ This follows straight on from his account of his visit to see the finds from Bassae while they were on Zante, and Hughes suggested that Lee was directly inspired by the successes of the Society of Travellers.⁵⁴⁰ While he was on Zante, Smart Hughes was also entertained by General Campbell, the eventual owner of the Metropolitan diadem, which may explain his involvement.⁵⁴¹ While it is not clear what Smart Hughes' role was on Ithaca, he and Lee certainly travelled together in Sicily.⁵⁴² The two seem to have shared an interest in the *Odyssey*. Their experience of their travels was framed through Homer, from the "rocks of the Cyclopes" that had been identified as such since Pliny's time through to being reminded of Polyphemus' cave by a night spent in a grotto with livestock.⁵⁴³

Ithaca's mythical significance seems to have been a major motivation for Lee's visit, and even before landing on the island, he described having "beheld the ruins of the Castle of Ulysses during the greater part of the transit."⁵⁴⁴ His account of the landscape seems to be haunted by myth. He also described a visit to the fountain of Arethusa and a different "house of Ulysses" which he dismissed as "probably at most a country seat of that sage warrior."⁵⁴⁵ Most of

⁵³⁸ Thomas Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania* vol. 1 (London: J. Mawman, 1820), 159-159; Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 36-37.

⁵³⁹ Thomas Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania* vol. 1, 164.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 109.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 109, 114.

⁵⁴⁴ Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 39.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

these identifications come from William Gell's account of his visit to the island in 1807, which specifically aimed to identify parts of the island that appeared in the poem.⁵⁴⁶



Figure 15. Lee's map of the excavation area on Aito

Although clearly following the example of Gell, Lee had different priorities: where Gell had surveyed the island and compared it with the text that made it famous, Lee was interested in excavating and collecting objects. The day after he arrived, he asked for the governor's permission to excavate and engaged labourers.⁵⁴⁷ He began excavating, not with one of Gell's Homeric sites, but with a set of Roman tombs that had been found to be fruitful by other travellers.

⁵⁴⁶ William Gell, *The Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807), 1.

⁵⁴⁷ Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 39.

They were not successful here, but soon found the site on the side of mount Aito, outside the ruins identified by Gell as Ulysses' palace where the knotted diadem seems to have been found, along with plenty of other material. When it became clear how rich these finds were, permission to excavate was withdrawn. This did not stop Lee from digging, and the rest of his report is peppered with references to conflicts with the authorities.

I then prepared a letter to the Commandant for the morning, in reply to his received at Oxoï; but, with Ulyssean forethought we deemed it unadvisable that it should be delivered to him until we had left the town with our detachment of eight labourers, and were actually at work on our old ground, on Mount Aito.⁵⁴⁸

Lee identified his group with Ulysses in their cunning evasion of the authorities. This sort of playful self-heroization crops up a couple of times in Lee's account - he also describes the finds as "opima spolia," likening them to Roman dedications of arms captured from enemy generals.⁵⁴⁹ The Ulysses comparison highlights the need for the hero's trademark sense of adventure and skills of manipulation for excavating. The desire to make such comparisons must have been strong, since Smart Hughes also did so:

The projector and leader of this enterprise was Mr. Fiott Lee, of whom it may be truly said, as of the famous Ithacensian hero, πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔδεν ἄρεα [sic] καὶ νόον ἔγνων.⁵⁵⁰

This quotation from the opening lines of the *Odyssey* seems more earnest, perhaps because it is applied to someone else, so does not have to avoid accusations of vanity. This could simply be an observation about character,

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁴⁹ Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 63.

⁵⁵⁰ Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, 162.

made in Greek to sound more learned. But the presence of this comparison in two writers with very different understandings of British involvement betrays more than a cliché triggered by the location. It seems that British travellers in Greece at this time identified strongly with this trickster-traveller. This does more than excuse their actions, it is a fundamental part of their sense of entitlement to the archaeology. We have seen (in chapter 2) how identification with ancient individuals can give a sense of inheritance of ideas and objects. For the travellers, the act of outwitting opponents in Odysseus' home land allowed them to actively participate in the myth. This was a straightforward heroisation, effacing the ambivalence felt by Gell about this aspect of Odysseus' character:

He has in all ages been held as the model of patriotism and of wisdom united with valour, and though his character is somewhat lowered by a frequent recourse to deceit and evasion, yet cunning was, and still, in those countries, held in the highest estimation.⁵⁵¹

When cunning was seen in a negative light, it was seen as a part of the Greek national character; as a positive quality it could be distinctively British. National concerns seem to have been important to the travellers, and Smart Hughes frames Lee's collecting as something done for national benefit:

Had this gentleman not been prevented by mean jealousy and undue influence, he would have enriched his country with a matchless collection of rare and valuable antiquities.⁵⁵²

This national emphasis makes perfect sense in Smart Hughes' account, since it follows straight after discussion of the British Museum's successful purchase of the marbles from Bassae. Lee's motivations seem to have been more personal, but he certainly felt some sort of right to excavate and a duty to secure such

⁵⁵¹ Gell, *The Geography and Antiquities of Ithaca*, 72.

⁵⁵² Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, 162.

rights for those who came after him - which he boasted of having done at the end of his *Archaeologia* account.⁵⁵³ However, Lee and his companions did not manage to outwit the authorities for long. Their digging was eventually stopped and many of the objects confiscated, since grave goods were deemed church property.⁵⁵⁴ Smart Hughes describes these items as falling into the hands of a “semi-barbarian” who melted some of them down.⁵⁵⁵ Smart Hughes usually used this term to refer to Turks, which could imply that the jewel passed through the hands of the island’s Ottoman authorities. His comparison of this individual to Verres implies abuse of power as much as misuse of art - with the usual blind spot about the British sense of entitlement.⁵⁵⁶

The fate of the diadem in this is not clear. The fact that there was time for Stackelberg to sketch it means that it probably escaped confiscation and was one of the items shared out in Lee’s account.⁵⁵⁷ The jewel could have been allotted to Campbell directly, if he was one of those involved in the excavations, or it could have been acquired indirectly later. The diadem seems to have been the object of particular interest by the group: it is one of very few objects not in Lee’s possession to feature in both his and Smart Hughes’ accounts and, apparently, the only object given an inscription:

An inscription being all that was wanting to render this a perfect bijou, a fanciful one was quickly devised; and we read on the under side, lightly

⁵⁵³ Lee, “Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands,” 54.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁵⁵⁵ Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, 162.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 162, 423, 425.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

engraved, ΣΑΦΦΟΥ ΛΑΟΔΑΜΙΑΣ; a discovery that soon spread far beyond our little antiquarian circle!⁵⁵⁸

The diadem was perceived to be crying out for an inscription. We have seen how important the stories derived from ancient texts were for delineating travellers' experiences of Greece. For Lee, the search for material remains seems also to have had a textual slant. Byron told of his fruitless search for new manuscripts at Athos and Lee took care to record any inscriptions he found on his travels.⁵⁵⁹ But the search for traces of ancient voices seems far removed from the fabrication of inscriptions.

The usual explanatory model for understanding questionable inscriptions is that it is an attempt to raise the value by adding historical associations, but this is not always the case.⁵⁶⁰ If this were a straightforward attempt to make this object more valuable with fabricated evidence for its ancient significance, admitting to the forgery in this way would be deeply counterproductive. It seems that the value added by the inscription is not financial or archaeological; indeed such false inscriptions can harm the appeal of a genuinely ancient object. The inscription is described as "fanciful," it is something satisfying to the whims of the group, but to understand why it was added we need to explore its content.

The reason for picking these two names is far from clear. Perhaps the most obvious thought on seeing the name Sappho next to another woman's name is of a romantic relationship between the two. Oliver seems to have explored this possibility but found no woman called Laodamia associated with Sappho in the

⁵⁵⁸ Lee, "Antiquarian Researches in the Ionian Islands," 50.

⁵⁵⁹ John Murray ed., *Lord Byron's Correspondence*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1922), 27.

⁵⁶⁰ Clive Wainwright, "The Importance of Provenance: Rehabilitated Fakes," in *Why Fakes Matter*, 174-183.

sources.⁵⁶¹ Instead he sees it as a reference to Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo delle Bellezze delle Donne*, a dialogue written in 1548 which mentions both names in close proximity: it lists the ancient poet, Sappho, alongside Laodamia Forteguerra, a modern one, and it implies that both were attracted to women. The reference to Sappho and Laodamia also mentions Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's *Symposium*, with its hints at the possibility of same-sex attraction between women. While Forteguerra's dialogue is a modern text, it is rich with references to ancient texts and authors. Under this reading, the inscription was a learned reference to the travellers' reading, with a hint of titillating same-sex desire.

While Oliver's explanation is a plausible one, the two names also carried other resonances that may have made them appealing for the inscription. Both Sappho and Laodamia (this time the mythical wife of Protesilaus) voice poems in Ovid's *Heroides*. Love remains the major theme, but in this case both represent frustrated heterosexual desire - even Sappho's poem is addressed to a man. In this incarnation, Laodamia is obsessed with images and absence - turning to a statue of her husband after his death in the Trojan war. Again, the parallel would link the object with desire and femininity, but in this case also with absence and images, themes that had long given this text a resonance for those dealing with ancient imagery and the longing to understand the lost past.⁵⁶² The themes of absent men and feminine longing must have also called to mind Penelope's wait on Ithaca for Odysseus - the theme of *Heroides* 1. They may also have had personal resonances for these travellers.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Andrew Oliver Jr. "Greek, Roman and Etruscan Jewelry" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* (May 1966): 269–284.

⁵⁶² Whitney Davis, "Winckelmann Divided: Mourning the Death of Art History," in *The Art of Art History: a Critical Anthology*, ed. D. Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 40–51.

⁵⁶³ e.g. C.R. Cockerell and Samuel Pepys Cockerell, *Travels in Southern Europe and the Levant, 1810–1817* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), 48.

The difficulty in separating out which versions of Sappho and Laodamia we are meant to read into this two-word inscription may have been part of the point. This is an exercise in erudition in which the same themes carry across different potential meanings, imbuing the diadem with resonances of desire, loss and feminine beauty. The inscription places the ancient object in a world of textual references and imbues it with emotional content. The same imaginative engagement with the past can be seen throughout the travellers' writings. It could manifest itself in flippant jokes, like Smart Hughes' observation that the gold of Ithaca might have been as much an incentive for Odysseus' return as Penelope's charms.⁵⁶⁴ It can also be seen in Cockerell's embodied reaction to a complex past at the site of Patroclus' tomb: stripping naked and running round it, in imitation of Achilles and Alexander before him.⁵⁶⁵ This act was already strange enough (and embarrassing enough) by the time his son published Cockerell's diary to require explanation:

The facilities for travelling nowadays have made us calmly familiar with the scenes of the past, but in 1810 to stand upon classic ground was to plant one's feet in a fairyland of romance, and a traveller who had got so unusually far might well permit his enthusiasm to find vent.⁵⁶⁶

Greece was seen as a place where one could experience the authentic ("classic ground") and the fantastical ("fairyland") simultaneously. The names inscribed on the genuine diadem make it an embodiment of this Romantic mode of experiencing the past. It allowed the group of excavators to explore the world this piece of jewellery represented to them as a group and create a tangible piece of evidence for both aspects of this experience. This particular approach to

⁵⁶⁴ Smart Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, 162.

⁵⁶⁵ Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 15.4. Susan Heuck Allen, *Finding the Walls of Troy: Frank Calvert and Heinrich Schliemann at Hisarlık* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 38.

⁵⁶⁶ C.R. Cockerell and Samuel Pepys Cockerell, *Travels in Southern Europe*, 40.

authenticity might also explain why the supposed forgery in the Fitzwilliam does not appear to be a very good forgery. The “in friendship” of its inscription makes no sense as a straight copy of the real thing, but works as a dedication on a replica made for another person who, like Lee, would have liked to own the original. Especially since, as we have seen, one of the names the group referred to themselves by was “The Friends.” The Ithaca jewel and its counterpart show a very different attitude to authenticity from our own, and so it is possible that the Fitzwilliam piece’s status as a replica could have been deemed unimportant from the start or forgotten in subsequent years.

No one would describe this as true archaeology, despite its close descriptions, itemised lists and carefully-drawn maps and diagrams. But such approaches to the past have made a lasting impression on the museum collections of Europe. We have seen how the personal and fanciful sits comfortably alongside the national pride in archaeological discoveries in the writings of Lee and Smart Hughes, but the implications of this coexistence spread beyond a few days’ stay in Ithaca. We know that some of the Society of Travellers were involved in the discovery of the original Ithaca diadem, even if we never know the full complement of excavators or the exact motivations of the forgery / replica. It gives a glimpse of the attitudes and approaches of this group that excavated the temples at Bassae and Aegina. While the acquisitive urge (whether national or personal) and the aspects of inquiry that seem familiar to us are well recognised, the Ithaca gem(s) are a reminder of the experiential, emotional and social aspects of travelling at this time. This kind of relationship with the past, in which ancient objects were bound up with personal experiences and inflected through a classical education seems far removed from the institutional context of the modern museum, but the Ithaca jewel shows how it has had a lasting impact on their collections.

These aspects of the experience tend not to be of interest for museums. As a result, both original and replica have confused museum professionals whose models of authenticity were based on a belief that false objects and false inscriptions were intended as deceptions, not as fictions. In a way, this object's time has come again: we are more interested than ever in fakes for what they can tell us about the time in which they were made. But the importance of the Ithaca jewel is not in a mystery solved (and in any case, mine is a patchy and speculative solution), but a paradox of authenticity embodied. The fake inscription, the wrongly inscribed fake and the relationship with the past these represent remain as alien to the practices of the museum today as they were in the mid-twentieth century. As such, the Ithaca jewel(s) can still unsettle our certainties about our abilities to grasp the past.

5. “Everything good we stood for”: exhibiting Greek art in World War II

Greek art seems an unlikely priority for work and interest in the fifth year of a world war. But in the summer of 1944 the Fitzwilliam Museum opened its *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D.1938*. This chapter looks in depth at this exhibition to explore what Greek art and its accompanying ancient narratives meant at this time. Museum histories tend to treat war as a period of disruption and hiatus, or pass over it all together - as I did in the previous chapter. This effaces museums’ very active role; one where ancient narratives are deployed to give a sense of continuity and universal values. Involvement in a conflict on the scale of World War II inevitably had an impact on museums, draining staff into more urgent work, and putting collections in danger of damage in attacks. During the war, paintings were hidden in slate mines; sculpture in tube stations.⁵⁶⁷ However, it also spurred a surge of temporary exhibitions which made full use of the museum’s potential to boost morale and spread ideas. Discourses about Greek art, freedom and society had always been potent tools for exploring national identity, but these narratives took on new meanings at a time when Greece was an occupied country with Britain fighting to liberate it.

We have seen throughout this thesis how narratives are chosen to fit contemporary needs, particularly political ones, and the temporary exhibitions of World War II are no exception. This chapter looks in depth at the *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D.1938* which was held in Cambridge and Norwich in the summer of 1944, focusing on the Cambridge exhibition because of the wealth of surviving records. It brought together objects from the Fitzwilliam and other university museums with others owned by shops and dealers and a range of private individuals. Private lenders included the exhibition organisers

⁵⁶⁷ Neil MacGregor, “A Pentecost in Trafalgar Square,” *Antioch Review* 61, 4 (2011): 763; “Elgin Marbles in Aldwych Tube Shelter: Safe Storage in the War,” *The Times*, April 6, 1946.

themselves and prominent archaeologists such as A.B. Cook, R.M. Dawkins and A.J.B. Wace.⁵⁶⁸ The objects represented an impressive time span of nearly 5000 years, from prehistory to the point at which it must have become difficult to get hold of any more recent works from an occupied country. It gave a sense of a long history whose future hung in the balance. In the words of one of its organisers:

The exhibition told the story of Greek art, and the 700 works of art, which covered a period of 50 centuries, made our own civilisation seem small. It might be asked why such an exhibition should be held at these times, and the answer was that Greek art was the symbol of everything good we stood for, and everything we were fighting for, and everything the Nazis and Fascism were seeking to crush. The Greeks were the source of science, of poetry, Homer was the first of many, and some of the earliest documents were written in Greek.⁵⁶⁹

The idea that Greek art could symbolise wider cultural achievements and show up the deficiencies of contemporary society was hardly new. Much of the rhetoric surrounding the exhibition would not look out of place in the debates over the Elgin acquisition, discussed in chapter 2. But much had also changed and the exhibition had to balance Greek and British national identities and to negotiate a broader canon of ancient art and a changing contemporary aesthetic.

The wealth of information surviving from this exhibition makes it an ideal case study for exploring these issues. This chapter uses archival evidence from exhibition planning documents, photographs, publicity material and visitor information, as well as newspaper reports and the published writings of its organisers. I will also consider the exhibition in the light of others organised by

⁵⁶⁸ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1944), iv, 56.

⁵⁶⁹ "'Greek Civilisation' Mr Seltman on Local Exhibition," *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 17, 1944, 5.

the same team, beginning with an exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1942 and one at the National Gallery of Scotland in 1943 and followed by another at the Royal Academy in 1946.⁵⁷⁰ The series was very much a war-time phenomenon: even though the 1946 exhibition was after the end of the war, its purpose was commemorative and many museums were still closed at this time.⁵⁷¹

This series of exhibitions enjoyed considerable official support. The British Council and the Greek Government in exile provided funding and support. The King of the Hellenes opened the first, and the Greek Ambassador spoke at the Cambridge opening.⁵⁷² The exhibitions also had substantial public impact. No visitor figures survive for the exhibition's run in the Fitzwilliam Museum, but the British Council's annual report for that year states that "The Greek Exhibition at Norwich was seen by 48 557 including organized parties of Allied Servicemen and Norwich school children."⁵⁷³ This was nearly 20 000 more than the Norwich Castle Museum's busiest month in recent years.⁵⁷⁴ The final exhibition in London attracted 72 413 visitors in 30 days, and reached further through repeated coverage in *The Times*.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁰ Letter from Charles Seltman to Carl Winter, 15.02.44. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope number 1075; Jacqueline Chittenden, and Charles Seltman. *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue of an Exhibition Held in 1946 at the Royal Academy, Burlington House, London*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947.

⁵⁷¹ The British Museum was still closed until later that year: "Opening to-day of the British Museum: Greek and Roman Art," *The Times*, April 24, 1946.

⁵⁷² "Exhibition of Greek Art: Opening by the King of the Hellenes," *The Times*, October 16, 1942, 7; "Greek Ambassador at Cambridge opens art exhibition," *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 10, 1944, 4-5.

⁵⁷³ British Council, *Report of the British Council for 1944-1945*, 114.

⁵⁷⁴ "General update on the Norwich Area Museums," Norwich Area Museums Committee, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.norwich.gov.uk/CommitteeMeetings/Norwich%20area%20museums/Document%20Library/22/Repnorwichmuseumscommitteegeneralupdate20110307.pdf>.

⁵⁷⁵ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue*, 10; "Greek Art: Exhibition at the Royal Academy," *The Times*, February 14, 1946.

Histories of museums that mention World War II often dwell on the practicalities of damage done and the evacuations of collections.⁵⁷⁶ Where they discuss the temporary “sacrificial” exhibitions, it is either to describe the destructive impact of war, or as an example of the role of museums in times of crisis.⁵⁷⁷ These were arguably early blockbuster exhibitions, but they aimed at more than popularity and there was often a specifically propagandist message. Interest in the use of art and archaeology as propaganda during this period tends to focus on the high-profile projects instigated by Fascist Governments, such as Mussolini’s identification with Augustus or Hitler’s “Rome-complex”.⁵⁷⁸ The Third Reich also made considerable use of museums, most famously with its degenerate art exhibition and Hitler’s plans for a museum at Linz.⁵⁷⁹ Such receptions are uncomfortable territory and often dismissed as “appropriation.”⁵⁸⁰ British war time propaganda in other media is a familiar part of our popular culture so perhaps it is time to reexamine the role of art.⁵⁸¹ The ideological importance of art, archaeology and museums at this time makes it unsurprising that both sides used these tools to legitimate themselves and their ideals. Propaganda emphasised how each country’s foundational beliefs made it superior (and hence the inevitable victor) but these foundational beliefs

⁵⁷⁶ Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 249-51; Richard Fortey, *Dry Store Room No. 1: The Secret Life of the Natural History Museum* (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 286-9.

⁵⁷⁷ Wilson, *The British Museum: A History*, 250; MacGregor, “A Pentecost in Trafalgar Square,” 763.

⁵⁷⁸ Peter Aicher, “Mussolini’s Forum and the Myth of Augustan Rome” *Classical Bulletin* 76, 2 (2000): 117-139; John T. Quinn, “The Ancient Rome of Adolf Hitler” *Classical Bulletin* 76, 2 (2000): 141-57.

⁵⁷⁹ Monika Ginzkey Puloy, “High Art And National Socialism Part 1: The Linz Museum as Ideological Arena,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 8, 2 (1996): 201-215.

⁵⁸⁰ Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 217-221.

⁵⁸¹ “Keep Calm and Carry On: The Secret History” The Guardian Blogs, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2012/mar/09/keep-calm-and-carry-on-secret-history>.

also shaped the content and effect of that propaganda.⁵⁸² This chapter explores an exhibition with strongly ideological aims, which was used by the British and Greek governments to define themselves against their enemies.

This chapter begins by exploring the exhibition in its context. It examines the exhibition's aims and why the Greek government, the British Council and Cambridge University staff would put time and resources into such a project. It considers why these groups were invested in Greek culture and how the exhibition presented Greek and British national identities and articulated the importance of their alliance. It goes on to explore the relationship between art and literature in the exhibition and the perceived role of these forms in structures of power that made art inextricably political. It will look at some of the uncertainties that crept into the exhibition as a result of changing understanding of art, archaeology, literature and their relationship with society as a whole. Finally, it reflects on the sentiment expressed by one of these organisers that "in a civilized polity something in the nature of a Museum will come into existence" and considers why the museum was chosen as the site for exploring an all-embracing ideal of Greek culture that went far beyond art.

⁵⁸² Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979), 426.

Context and contents

While many members of staff were otherwise occupied and many of the museum's collections were in storage, the Fitzwilliam Museum did not completely shut during the war.⁵⁸³ Five rooms were kept open, with temporary displays that changed each term.⁵⁸⁴ Most of these exhibitions were not explicitly about the war, although some did find historical parallels for contemporary events. For example, one compared Napoleon's invasion plans with those of Hitler, with the comforting implication that such threats had been faced and defeated before.⁵⁸⁵

There were also exhibitions elsewhere in Cambridge. In the week that it opened, the Greek art exhibition was competing with at least two other temporary displays: one of paintings, held in a gas showroom, and one of weapons (old and new) in the Corn exchange.⁵⁸⁶ These were both part of "salute the troops week", a celebration that included a million-pound fundraising target and a literal salute of the troops as they paraded past the Fitzwilliam and along King's Parade.⁵⁸⁷ The exhibition does not seem to have been explicitly connected to this celebration, but it fits with the general use of cultural events to support morale and tap into topics of interest for a public experiencing war. The exhibition was also competing with other attractions, including a funfair which advertised the opportunity to see (and ride on) Nero the World's Largest St Bernard's Dog.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸³ For example, the keeper of antiquities, Winifred Lamb, was working for the BBC. Letter from Ministry of Labour and National Service to Fitzwilliam Museum, September 23, 1941. Fitzwilliam Museum archive envelope 540.

⁵⁸⁴ "The Fitzwilliam Museum: Special Exhibits," *The Times*, November 18, 1942, 6.

⁵⁸⁵ "Napoleon's Invasion Project: History in Broad-sides," *The Times*, October 7, 1940, 6.

⁵⁸⁶ *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 11, 1944, 1; *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 8, 1944, 8.

⁵⁸⁷ "Record Crowd Salutes the Soldier" *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 8, 1944, 6-7.

⁵⁸⁸ "At the Cambridge Fair," *The Cambridge Daily News*, June 22, 1944, 8.

Despite these potential distractions, *Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D. 1938* was met with considerable excitement. It was opened at 12 noon on the 9th of May 1944, with speeches by Thanassis Aghnides (the Greek Ambassador); Dr. T.S. Hele (the university Vice-Chancellor); Sir Will Spens (a representative of the British Council); and J.T. Sheppard (classicist and Provost of King's College).⁵⁸⁹ Other dignitaries who attended the opening included the head of the Greek Orthodox church in Britain and the Mayor of Cambridge.⁵⁹⁰ The exhibition was accompanied by a production of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* at the Arts Theatre, a gala performance of which was held the same night and attended by the same guests of honour.⁵⁹¹ There was also a performance of Greek folk dances held in the gardens of Downing College.⁵⁹²

Objects in the exhibition were given numbers rather than labels, and a guide booklet with information about each object was distributed to visitors. The exhibition can be fairly comprehensively reconstructed from this guide as well as the plans and photographs kept by the museum. The continuity of material used between exhibitions in the series means it is also possible to see objects not publicly available today in the illustrated catalogue of 1946.⁵⁹³ It occupied four rooms on the upper gallery of the Fitzwilliam that were usually used for paintings. The choice must have been partially practical (at the time, these rooms were empty) but they also offered a grand space, that emphasised

⁵⁸⁹ Letter from Charles Seltman to Louis Clarke April 18, 1944. Fitzwilliam Archive envelope 1075; "Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens art Exhibition," 4-5.

⁵⁹⁰ "Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens art Exhibition."

⁵⁹¹ "The 'Ibsen of the Classics': Revealing the Mind of Women," *The Cambridge Daily News*, May 10, 1944: 4-5.

⁵⁹² "Greek Folk Dancing: Attractive Display at Downing College" *The Cambridge Daily News*, June 21, 1944.

⁵⁹³ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: a Commemorative Catalogue*.

the aesthetic value of the objects on display.⁵⁹⁴ The impact of this could be transformative: bed curtains were hung in a space designed for old masters and thus became high art (see figure 16).

The exhibition told the history of Greek art in reverse chronological order from contemporary to prehistoric art.⁵⁹⁵ The first and largest room was dominated by the large embroideries hanging on the walls which, along with pottery, represented more recent Greek art. Cases at the sides of the gallery showed pottery, coins and other smaller objects. The far wall seems to have had examples of religious painting, with copies of bronze sculpture from Pompeii flanking the door.



⁵⁹⁴ Letter from Charles Seltman to Louis Clarke February 15, 1944. Fitzwilliam Archive envelope 1075.

⁵⁹⁵ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D. 1938.*

Figure 16. The first room of the exhibition. Note the sand bag on the floor at the centre of the picture.

Visitors entering the next room met a line of classical sculpture, including a head from the Parthenon (lent by A.B. Cook) and an Apollo Sauroktonos from the Fitzwilliam's own collection (visible in figures 16, 18 and 20).⁵⁹⁶ Red figure and white ground pottery was displayed in a case to the left of these and bronzes to the right. There were coins on either side of the doorway and other freestanding sculpture dotted around the room (see figures 17 and 18).

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 23-4.

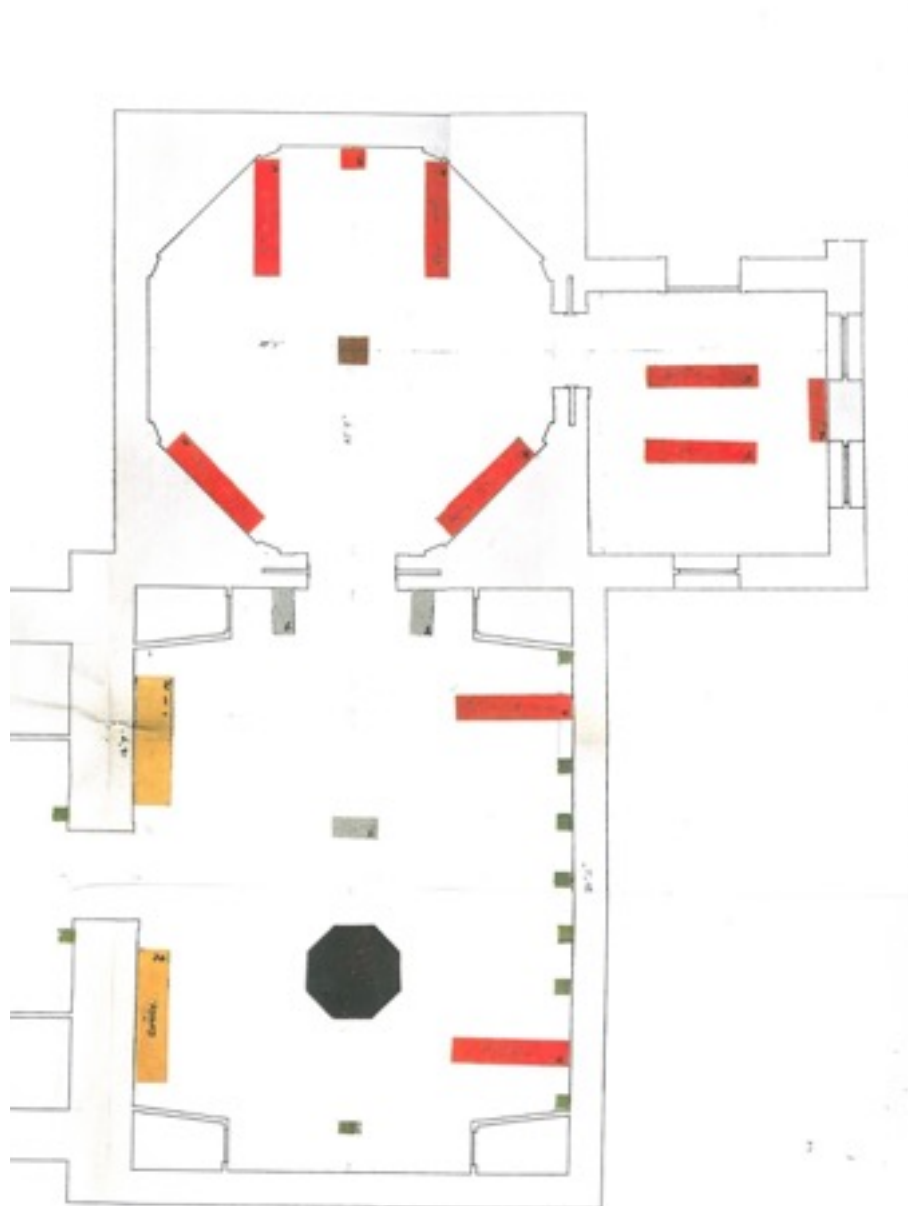


Figure 17. A plan of the second, third and fourth rooms of the exhibition. Visitors entered and exited by the doorway to the bottom left.

The next section of the exhibition was a smaller, octagonal room, dominated by a large Geometric vase in its centre. It contained four cases: (clockwise from entrance) “early bronzes”, “BF [black figure] vases” “geom. [geometric] vases” and “early t.e.[terraccottas]” - suggestions in brackets are reconstructed from guide section headings. The final room was the smallest, with only three cases,

containing Helladic, Minoan and Cycladic art. Even with the most ancient objects, relevance to the modern world was stressed: "Here, five thousand years ago, was a precise and formal art which has helped not a little to influence those modern sculptors who prefer to discard realism."⁵⁹⁷ This room was a dead end, meaning that the journey from the distant past through to modernity was physically enacted by visitors on their journey out of the gallery.



Figure 18. The second room of the exhibition, looking into the third.

While the *Cambridge Daily News* stated that the exhibition contained only original material, there were a number of copies used.⁵⁹⁸ These included objects from Seltman's own collection and from the university's collections, such as copies of high-profile discoveries from Mycenae as well as Roman copies

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁹⁸ "Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens art Exhibition."

displayed alongside Greek originals.⁵⁹⁹ The guide makes clear where copies were used, so it is likely that the *Cambridge Daily News* misunderstanding is based on the fact that the exhibition made no use of Cambridge's extensive cast collections. In his proposal to the Fitzwilliam, Seltman specifically ruled out the use of casts.⁶⁰⁰ This is understandable, since plaster casts were out of favour at this time, but also would have moved emphasis towards sculpture, something Seltman would have been keen to avoid: as we shall see, he believed that sculpture had been given too much emphasis in histories of Greek art.⁶⁰¹

Despite the flow from contemporary to ancient in the exhibition, the starting point was not the most recent piece of art. Indeed, it was not even art. It was a display called "Byron and the Liberation of Greece" containing an assortment of objects relating to Lord Byron, including pistols and other weapons he used in Greece, a medal struck by the Greek Government on the anniversary of his death and even a cap and watch chain that once belonged to him.⁶⁰² This departure from the exhibition's stated aim shows the importance of the relationship between Britain and Greece both in motivating the exhibition and in shaping its message. While Byron's pistols did not fit the exhibition's theme, they were the perfect match for the subtext of British involvement in Greek self-determination. These weapons, used by a British man to fight for Greek independence, established a strong historical parallel between British involvement in the Greek War of Independence and the contemporary alliance. Meanwhile, Byron's status as a renowned poet demonstrated Greece's importance as a source of artistic inspiration, powerful enough to be worth

⁵⁹⁹ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D. 1938*, 22, 52.

⁶⁰⁰ Charles Seltman, letter to Louis Clarke January 8, 1944, Fitzwilliam Archive, envelope 2487.

⁶⁰¹ Mary Beard, "Casts and Cast-offs: the Origins of the Museum of Classical Archaeology," 1–29; Charles Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art* (London: Studio publications, 1948), 13.

⁶⁰² *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000 B.C.-A.D. 1938*, 5.

fighting for. This set the tone for the rest of the exhibition which presented Greek art as a source of inspiration and glamorised it as a motivation for military action and the defence of Greek freedom.

National identity

The exhibition was funded by the Greek Government in exile and the British Council.⁶⁰³ It used its presentation of Greek art to make the case for Greek independence and express deep cultural roots for the contemporary relationship between Greece and Britain. This period has been described as the peak of British involvement in Greek affairs, despite the fact that Greece was an occupied country between 1941 and 1944.⁶⁰⁴ The exhibition at the Fitzwilliam came just before the end of the occupation and was a symptom of the close involvement between the two governments at this time. Looking at it in this context explains why such a collaboration took place, but it can also shed interesting light on how the relationship between Greece and Britain was expressed to the public.

The local news report of the speech given by the Greek ambassador, Thanassis Agnides, at the opening takes a particular interest in the two nations' shared identification with ancient Greece:

"Greek art grew as a natural phenomenon through the unconscious urge of Greek genius" he continued "and I hope you will not think me over bold if I compare it to your own achievements in the realm of artistic creation, in particular in the fields of poetry and political art." If Greece had evolved the noblest principles of political thought, England, he felt, vindicated those principles in the most astounding and beneficial manner in the noblest of all political creations, the British Empire.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ Letter from Charles Seltman to Carl Winter, February 15, 1944. Fitzwilliam Museum Archive, Envelope 1075.

⁶⁰⁴ Richard Clogg, "The Greek Government-in-Exile 1941-4," *The International History Review* 1, 3 (1979): 376-398.

⁶⁰⁵ "Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens Art Exhibition" 4-5.

The speech shows many of the associations between art, literature and politics that we have already seen in the Select Committee report on the Elgin Marbles in chapter 2. Like that report, it expressed the idea that the English are inheritors of the ideal of ancient Athens. But these ideas had been modified to a new political context. The association of Greek art with literature and politics into a holistic ideal was still being used to express national identity, but it was applied to both Greece and Britain. The message is that theirs was an alliance based on cultural commonalities.

The two forces which Hamilakis calls western and indigenous Hellenism are present side by side.⁶⁰⁶ Both modern Greece and modern Britain saw themselves as the inheritors of ancient Greece. However, the ambassador gives the two nations very different roles - stressing Greece as the inheritor of an artistic “urge” and Britain as inheritor of the verbal strengths of politics and poetry - possibly in reference to the Byron section of the exhibition. The result is a paradoxical celebration of Greek independence as dependent on foreign imperialism. It is important that the ambassador ended his speech with a “tribute to the help given Greece by the Dominions.” The colonialist tendencies of western Hellenism are clearly acknowledged and accepted by referring to the British Empire as the “noblest of all political creations.” This reflects inequalities of power in the political situation, in which an exiled government depended on the support of others for any hope of return.

The context of a museum exhibition allowed the Greeks to express their power in an alternative sphere: the shared value system of the arts. In legitimating Britain’s claim to Greek heritage, the ambassador implied that modern Greece should be the arbiter of such claims. The idea that Greece’s real power was cultural, not military, has a long history from Horace’s famous line “*graecia*

⁶⁰⁶ Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology and the National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57-123.

capta ferum victorem cepit” through to the Metaxas regime’s emphasis on the spiritual and cultural power of the Greek nation, rather than territorial expansion.⁶⁰⁷ While this cultural power is something of a cliché, the Greek government was clearly able to use the country’s cultural capital for its own ends on this occasion. The ambassador’s speech used the British belief that they are the true heirs of ancient Greece to stress their obligation to defend the land and its people from those who are not.

⁶⁰⁷ Hor. *Epist.* 2.1.156-7; Hamilakis *The Nation and its Ruins*, 174.

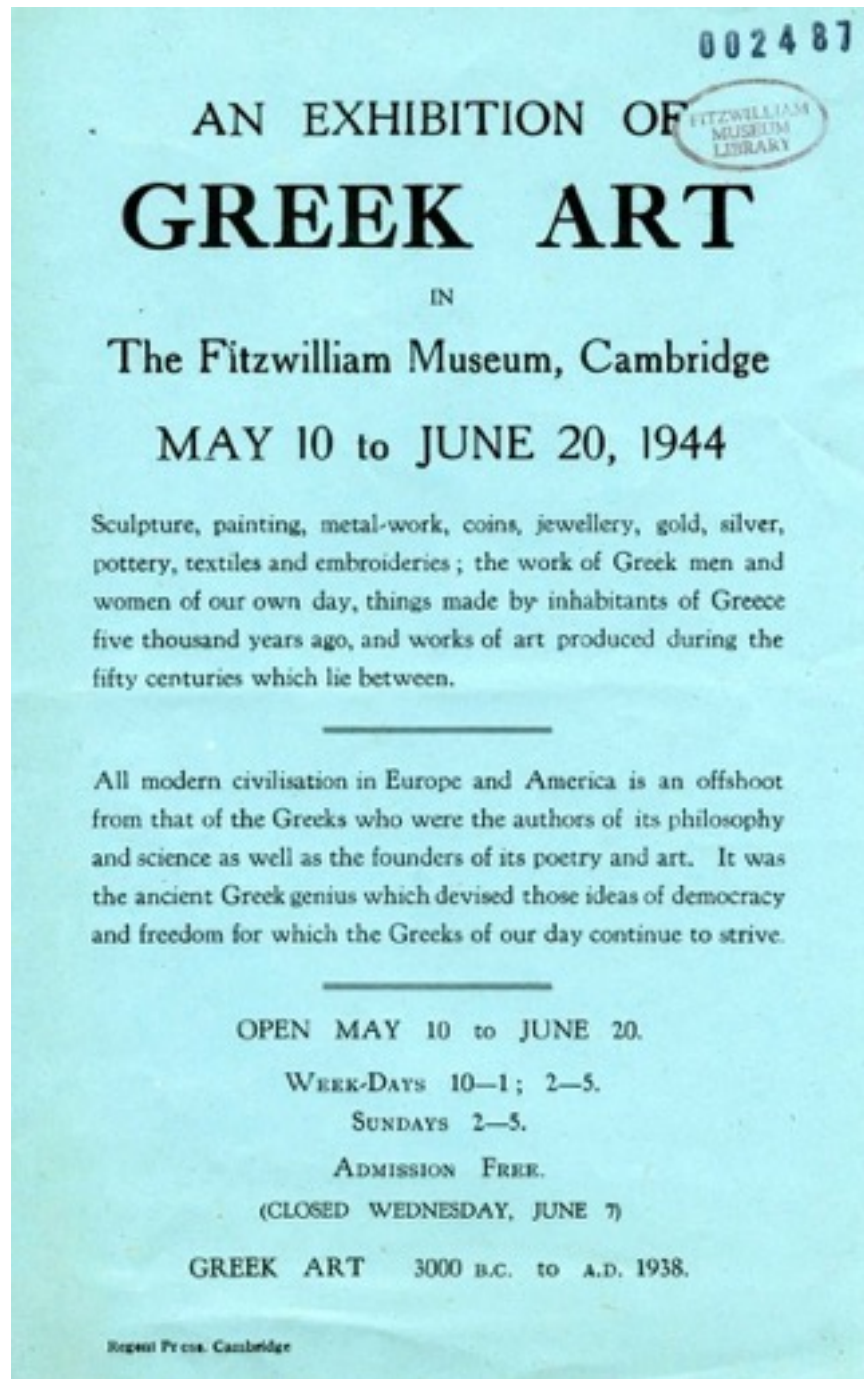


Figure 19. The poster used to advertise the exhibition.

The idea of a debt owed to Greece for its cultural influence can be found throughout the material relating to the exhibition. It was even used to advertise the exhibition - its poster credited ancient Greece with “all modern civilisation in Europe and America” (figure 19).

By this reasoning, Greek art was the tangible manifestation of the values that were being fought for in Greece and across Europe. We have seen how Seltman thought that “Greek art was the symbol of everything good we stood for, and everything we were fighting for, and everything the Nazis and Fascism were seeking to crush.”⁶⁰⁸ Seltman framed himself as a rescuer of Greek art by describing how he managed to get the large Geometric vase (from his own collection) out of Paris days before the Germans arrived.⁶⁰⁹ Even the parameters set out by the exhibition’s title (3000 B.C.- A.D. 1938) carry the threat that being a conquered nation could mean the end of an era. For Aghnides, Greek art showed how foreign and out of place Greece’s occupiers were and cemented bonds with other more similar nations:

...the rich harvest of five thousand years cannot be destroyed even though the Axis brings misery and starvation to the land. Indeed, looked on as a bridge between Greek civilisation and other civilisations of freedom, were these examples of Greek art not the most damning indictment of the barbarian imported into Greece by the Teuton and Bulgar?⁶¹⁰

The idea that Greece’s occupiers are opposed to the values of Greek art was an important way to deny the legitimacy of the occupation. While the Nazi party was happy to make use of Greek art to propagandist ends, their archaeological theories denied its Greekness: ascribing Greek cultural achievement to an influx of Indo-European speakers. They did not see Greek art as an indigenous achievement and even thought that interbreeding with the local population

⁶⁰⁸ “‘Greek Civilisation’ Mr Seltman on Local Exhibition,” 5.

⁶⁰⁹ “‘Greek Civilisation’ Mr Seltman on Local Exhibition,” 5.

⁶¹⁰ “Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens Art Exhibition” 4-5.

caused it to decline.⁶¹¹ To counteract this idea of a sudden, foreign influence, it was not enough to look at the supposed peaks of Greek achievement and it became important to look at Greek art as a continuous process of development. Seltman would later write:

...the fifth-century art of Athens was no inexplicable miracle, but something founded in a long tradition. We now know that because one generation after another had, for more than two centuries, been devoted to fine art, literature, the humanities and bold experiment, the people of Athens were able to create that which still stands upon their Acropolis.⁶¹²

This explains why the overall theme of the exhibition was continuity, not interruption. The 3000 B.C to 1938 A.D time span of the title was represented in the galleries as a flow artistic influence and development from prehistory to the present. In this narrative of Greek art history, art transcends periods of interruption and destruction - the guide booklet speaks of "the unholy destruction wrought upon the Greek empire by brutish crusaders and fanatical Janissaries."⁶¹³ Outside influences were also recognised, but offset with assertions of what Greek artists added. The guide book found a paradoxical originality in Greek adoption of foreign motifs: "The originality of Byzantine genius is apparent... in the transformation of oriental designs into something fresh."⁶¹⁴

The sense of continuity in Greek art was strongest in descriptions of the folk art which constituted the most modern element of the exhibition. The *Cambridge*

⁶¹¹ Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 350-1.

⁶¹² Charles Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 52.

⁶¹³ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 8.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

Daily News article on the exhibition (which follows the words of the organisers closely, often reproducing the guide book verbatim) commented that:

There is also an amazing steadfastness of design from 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1938 which although it shows signs of Turkish, Italian and other influences, adheres chiefly to the geometric. Similar patterns are used for both pottery and embroidery...The most recent items displayed are specimens of pottery made in Skyros, chiefly in 1938, which include an “askoi”, [sic] with a spout and a loop handle almost identical in shape to an askos dating from about 1200 B.C.

The gallery guide repeatedly suggests commonalities between ancient and modern pottery, using the same categories (askos, amphora, antefix) to describe them as ancient objects and explicitly noting adaption of ancient designs.⁶¹⁵ The sense of dialogue with the past through everyday craftsmanship is most strongly stated in the more detailed introduction of the 1946 guide, which said of a modern antefix that appeared in both exhibitions:

Nor have the gods vanished... The volutes which support the head of the god and the petal-like rays behind it have an ancient source. And who could be older than this pre-Greek god? Yet this Hermes was made but a few years ago to be placed high on a house there, flaunting winged hat and Ionian youthfulness, to look down on what once was Dorian Sparta.⁶¹⁶

Similarly deep roots were claimed for recent Greek embroidery. The section of the gallery guide on black-figure vases emphasises that Corinthian pots “remind us constantly of the embroideries in the long gallery and are indirect

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶¹⁶ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: a Commemorative Catalogue*, 20.

evidence for the needlework of a distant time."⁶¹⁷ The embroidery section gendered this tradition to explain why it is often overlooked.

The richness and splendour of the embroideries are rooted in a long tradition, and if one usually thinks of the accomplishments of the great men of Greece, here one sees, in the art which has endured longest, the achievement of her women.⁶¹⁸

It is telling that the embroidery write-up was the only section of the visitor guide delegated to the female vice chair of the exhibition committee, Jacqueline Chittenden. Seltman thought of himself as a feminist, but was prone to gender essentialism when it came to who worked with which media.⁶¹⁹ Despite this, embroidery was clearly taken very seriously as a Greek art form, taking up nearly five pages of the exhibition guide and 17% of the objects in the exhibition. The interest in embroidery reflects a belief that the power of tradition to pass on skills and designs could overcome the ephemeral nature of embroidery and reconstruct lost ancient textiles. There was a fashion for collecting Greek embroidery among those working at the British School in Athens, and most of the embroidery was lent by people with connections to that institution, including R.M. Dawkins, A.J.B. Wace and his wife, Seltman and Chittenden.⁶²⁰ This emphasis on contemporary Greek art as the work of unnamed craftspeople may be an accident of loan availability. Certainly the 1946 exhibition at the Royal Academy had modern paintings by named artists. However, it also reflects the biases of collectors, prioritising Greek tradition

⁶¹⁷ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 50.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶¹⁹ Charles Seltman, *Riot in Ephesus* (London: Parrish, 1958), 6; Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 8.

⁶²⁰ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 56, iv.

over Greek avant-garde, not least because this was believed to reflect the (even more valued) ancient past.

The emphasis on tradition in contemporary Greek culture can also be seen in the display of Greek folk dancing, held in the grounds of Downing College:

...the Greeks had always loved the innocent pleasures of singing and dancing, and in no other country were the two arts so closely allied to one another...The songs and dances were all traditional, although two of them had not actually been put on paper until recently. They dated from different periods, and helped to tell the history and the hopes and fears of Greece...Those who interpreted them were themselves Greeks, and well qualified to express the thoughts and feelings of their forefathers. They did so in a natural and genuine manner, and soon had their audience interested in their passion for freedom, their love affairs, or the kiss received from a shepherdess received by a boy of 12 - a kiss he never forgot.⁶²¹

This presents an ideal that is simultaneously pastoral and political but it hardly expresses respect for Greece as a modern nation. Greeks are described as natural, innocent and only just thinking of writing down their traditions. Even the “passion for freedom” is seen more as a sentiment, parallel with love, than a political belief. While this might be deemed worth protecting, it shows the scope for slippage between ancient and modern that follows from ideas of continuity and shows the paternalistic attitude of the British towards Greece. It is repeatedly implied that continuity between past and present is natural, or even innate. From Aghnides’ description of Greek art as a “natural phenomenon” to the local paper’s description of one of the pieces of embroidery: “A sampler made by a child in Skyros about 1938 shows how the

⁶²¹ “Greek Folk Dancing: Attractive Display at Downing College.”

art is inbred in the people.”⁶²² This ignores the agency of modern Greeks in passing on a tradition or picking up an old motif.

This idea that the uneducated peasant is somehow more close to the ancient world than other Greeks is also a recurring one in Greek discourse about their own past.⁶²³ The stereotype of the peasant naturally in touch with his or her past clearly appealed to both Greek and British Hellenism but it also offered an alternative to heavily text-oriented approaches to the past that are found in both traditions. The orality of the transmission of the songs made it seem more authentic, more closely linked with the ancient world, more natural. But, as the discourse around peasant traditions makes clear, this is an approach to the past that is only available to those born to it. For those (whether Greek or British) without such unmediated access to ancient traditions, texts remained an important touchstone for understanding Greek art. As such, they played an important part in the exhibition.

⁶²² “Greek Ambassador at Cambridge Opens Art Exhibition,” 4-5.

⁶²³ Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins*, 151, 200-1.

Art and literature

While the exhibition was inevitably most focused on visual arts, its organisers referred to art as just one among many Greek cultural achievements. We have already seen how Aghnides' speech and Seltman's writings list art, literature and politics as closely related aspects of the heritage of ancient Greece. This interest in Greek art in its broadest sense brought other cultural productions under the exhibition's remit, such as the folk dancing discussed in the previous section. These shared a desire to show cultural continuity from the ancient world into the present. The same impulse may be seen in the use of literary texts from ancient Greece to both deepen the sense of ancient context and reflect on the present. The texts that were chosen and the way they were used shows the impression of ancient Greece (and of Greekness more generally) that the organisers were trying to create. Some of the texts are surprising choices and reflect an attempt to develop a new theory of the relationship between art, literature and society. This theory responds to recent developments in classics and modern art in what would otherwise be a very traditional celebration of classical Greece.

Although literature tended to be mentioned in passing as an example of Greek excellence, it also played a prominent role in the supporting material and events relating to the exhibition, including the gala performance of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, translated by Gilbert Murray. It is difficult to gauge the production's impact, but performances were held all week, and it was extensively discussed in the local paper. According to the Cambridge Daily News, which ran its review of *Trojan Women* right next to its coverage of the exhibition, the play was:

The great cry of bitter anguish wrung from the hearts of women who have lost all under the stress of war...terrible in its sense of the relentless inevitable, yet having a beauty reflected from a spirit of

nobility and courage under dire adversity, a spirit that distinguishes character in individuals and in nations.

Its topicality today, when nations are enslaved, is unmistakable and some may see in its picture of a conquered people fresh evidence of the rightness of a modern, present day cause that is a crusade of liberation.⁶²⁴

Contemporary relevance seems to have been an aim of the theatre's programme - the previous week's performance had been about "re-educating Nazi Youth in post-war Germany."⁶²⁵ But the play also provoked debate in the local paper about the accessibility of "the classics." The play's director, Norman Marshall, used a speaking engagement that week to complain about "tremendous arrogance of the plain man" - a sort of reverse snobbery in which people are unwilling to even try high culture.⁶²⁶ A pseudonymous letter to the editor of the local newspaper responded that it was Marshall's productions, not the plays themselves, that were difficult to understand:

If he must put on these morbid, moping and melancholy types with their Freudian complexes and gloomy introspections, he should help eager and tolerant persons to derive some pleasure and interest...Give on the programmes an adequate outline of the plot and purpose of the play, for without such a guide none but students can make "top nor tail" of a difficult, unusual and woeful tragedy like the "Trojan Women." I could not gather the scattered threads even at the end.

⁶²⁴ "The Ibsen of the Classics': Revealing the Mind of Women."

⁶²⁵ "The Ibsen of the Classics': Revealing the Mind of Women."

⁶²⁶ "The Arrogance of the Plain Man' Mr Norman Marshall Hits Out," *The Cambridge Daily News*, June 14, 1944.

The letter's writer seemed to agree with Marshall that tragedy could be something of value *because* it was difficult: something that should be relevant to everyone, but often falls short. This complexity meant that, while a Greek tragedy lacks the direct simplicity of most propaganda, its very reputation for being difficult and worthy lent a sense of dignity and importance to ancient Greek culture and contemporary Greek struggle.

This was not the first time this play had been used as a comment on modern wars.⁶²⁷ The preface to the 1915 edition of Murray's translation stressed its contemporary relevance because of the unchanging nature of war:

Great art has no limits of locality or time. Its tidings are timeless, and its messages are universal. The *Trojan Women* was first performed in 415 BC, from a story of the siege of Troy which even then was ancient history. But the pathos of it is as modern to us as it was to the Athenians. The terrors of war have not changed in three thousand years.⁶²⁸

This approach sees Greek drama as the perfect way to reflect upon the repetition of history, from myth through ancient times to the aftermath of the First World War. Murray himself described *Trojan Women* as "the first great denunciation of war in European literature."⁶²⁹ In fact, this status is far from clear: Euripides presents many conflicting points of view; by turns celebrating and challenging the place of war in Athenian ideology.⁶³⁰ This opportunity to

⁶²⁷ Fiona Macintosh, "Tragedy in Performance: Nineteenth- and Twentieth- Century Productions" in *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 302-3.

⁶²⁸ Francis Hovey Stoddard, preface to Gilbert Murray trans. *The Trojan Women of Euripides* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1915).

⁶²⁹ Martin Ceadel, "Murray and International Politics" in *Gilbert Murray Reassessed: Hellenism, Theatre, and International Politics*, ed. Christopher Stray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217-38.

⁶³⁰ Neil T. Croally, *Euripidean Polemic: The Trojan Women and the Function of Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 253-6.

explore a range of attitudes to war, including Murray's belief that it was an anti-war play with as much relevance to modern as ancient warfare must have influenced the organisers' choice in 1944.

But the play was not only chosen for its universal relevance in times of conflict, it was also important for its Greekness. It is striking that the modern Greeks are likened to a group conquered by their mythical ancestors. This identification means a focus on the suffering of the Greek people and on Greece as a conquered nation. The dissonance and negativity of identifying the Trojan women with modern Greeks was managed by seeing the play itself as a Greek triumph. The newspaper report emphasised the strength of Euripides' handling of characters and emotions, comparing him with Ibsen and Tchaikovsky. This allows the play to stand for the universal relevance of Greek literature, both speaking to the Greek people in their defeat and reminding them of their mythic victories and cultural achievements.

Greek literature could represent its own time and seem to foretell and explain events in the present. This scope for multiple simultaneous meanings, made it a powerful tool for achieving the organisers' aims. The sense of relevance and repetition helped to give an impression of cultural continuity between past and present, but it also implied that there was something special about ancient Greece to be able to speak to the present in this way. Chittenden wrote that "an understanding of the trends and the tempo of a span of history is important. It reveals that whatever else may change, humanity itself remains constant in several ways."⁶³¹ She thought that art was as powerful a source of this understanding as literature, but the art in the exhibition was inflected through literary quotations in the guide booklet given to the exhibition's visitors. Although this guide set out to keep introductory material to a minimum, it

⁶³¹ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: a Commemorative Catalogue*, 12.

began with a quotation from an ancient author about ancient art, which was here used to speak for the entire 50 century span of the exhibition:

Zeus caused a russet cloud to draw nigh to them and rained on them abundant gold, while grey-eyed Athene herself bestowed on them every art, so that they surpassed all mortal men by their deftness of hand, and along the roads rose works of art like unto beings that lived and moved; and great was their fame.⁶³²

This is not a typical quotation on the achievements of Greek art, but a passing reference in a celebration of a Rhodian boxing victor in Pindar's *Olympian* 7.⁶³³ The same quotation was also used to introduce the catalogue of the 1946 exhibition, so the exhibition organisers clearly thought it an important starting point for transmitting the exhibition's message. Removed from the context of the rest of the poem, it loses its specific reference to Rhodes and can be read as a broader celebration of the Greek people and their artistic talents. It reiterates the exhibition's message about the skill, realism and renown of Greek art from an ancient source. The idea of Greek artistic talent as a blessing from the gods expresses the feeling that there is something exceptional about the moment that produced classical art. In an exhibition obsessed with origins and continuity, this offered a sort of ancient origin myth for the material on display. In doing this it placed a clear emphasis on ancient art as both source and point of comparison for the rest of Greek art.

Pindar may have seemed a particularly useful author for this role because of the strong links between his poetry and ancient art. His work was known to be part of a context in which both literature and art flourished, and in which both could serve the same purpose of commemorating victors in athletic contexts. Since the

⁶³² *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 5.

⁶³³ Line 49-53.

late nineteenth century, Pindar had been seen as an author whose work could not only shed light on archaeological sites, but also be understood better in the light of such research.⁶³⁴ Excavations at Olympia continued until 1943, so this remained a highly topical work of literature. The fact that these excavations were German and used for propaganda purposes must have been all the more motivation to try to reclaim it.⁶³⁵

Pindar is also a problematic author for understanding ancient art. The coexistence of poetry and statues as modes of commemoration generated a rivalry that Pindar clearly expressed, describing monuments as limited to one location and susceptible to physical damage in ways that poetry was not.⁶³⁶ While an exhibition of art that has lasted for centuries and travelled across the seas contradicts Pindar's view, it still sits ill with a celebration of Greek art as a physical manifestation of a lost culture. Even the apparent praise in this passage of Olympian 7 can be read to imply the superiority of Pindar's poetry, compared with the deceptive nature of statues.⁶³⁷ The infamous ambiguity of Pindar's language, means that this reading is easily missed, and it certainly does not stand out in the quotation used in the guide. But the denigration of art hidden behind this apparent celebration clearly shows the difficulties of making ancient voices speak in modern contexts - a theme we will return to in the conclusion of this thesis.

The guide also makes use of ancient literature to reflect on specific objects in the sculpture section of the exhibition. This section occupied the most prominent

⁶³⁴ Richard C. Jebb, "Pindar," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 3 (1882): 144-183.

⁶³⁵ Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, 352.

⁶³⁶ Maria Pavlou, "Pindar Nemean 5: Real and Poetic Statues," *Phoenix* 64, 1-2 (2010): 1-17; Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past*, 22-23.

⁶³⁷ Patrick O'Sullivan, "Pindar and the Statues of Rhodes," *The Classical Quarterly* 55, 1 (2005): 96-104.

point in the galleries, with its central grouping of sculptures facing visitors as they entered the exhibition. The introduction to the relevant section in the guide is comparatively long (one of only two such sections to take up half a page, at a time when paper was scarce) and packed with literary quotations.⁶³⁸ The first of these is from a somewhat obscure philosophical orator:⁶³⁹

‘It is the Greek custom’ wrote Maximus Tyrius in the 2nd century of our era ‘to represent the gods by the finest things on earth - pure material, the human form, consummate art. The idea of those who make divine images in human shape is reasonable, because the spirit of man is nearest of all things to godhead.’⁶⁴⁰

This picks up some of the themes of the lines from Pindar: the quality of Greek art, the gods and realistic depiction of the human form. These themes are reflected in the sculpture section, which was dominated by heads and torsos of gods and humans. Despite the thematic unity at first sight, the guide book indicates considerable diversity in this section: ranging from a head from one of the metopes of the Parthenon to a marble Hippopotamus from Alexandria, with a chronological span of more than five hundred years. As a late writer trying to explore a long artistic tradition Maximus may have offered an appealing way to deal with this variety.

⁶³⁸ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue*, 9.

⁶³⁹ M.B. Trapp, “Introduction” in *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations*, xi.

⁶⁴⁰ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 23; Max.Tyr., *Or.* 2.3.



Figure 20. The most prominent pieces in the sculpture section

Unlike other authors more commonly used to reflect on ancient attitudes to art, Maximus offers a philosophical text with a real interest in the meaning of art and the problems of images. The quotation comes from an oration which considers whether images of the gods are necessary for worship, discusses the fact that such images are used by all cultures and comes to the conclusion that images do not embody the gods, but can help stimulate worshippers to experience them.⁶⁴¹ As a Greek text, commenting on Greek culture from a comparative perspective, it lends itself especially well to the exhibition's theme,

⁶⁴¹ Max. Tyr. Or. 2; Trapp, "Oration 2, Introduction," in *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations*, 15-17.

not least because it concludes that the Greeks' way of representing the gods is the best. This is another attempt to get ancient words to attest to the greatness of Greek art. Again, the ancients seem to speak for themselves, this time from an almost art-historical perspective that fits well with the context of an exhibition guide.

However, Maximus did not set out to write art history, and this is in fact more of a meditation on the nature of the gods and the relationship of imitations to reality. It was part of a contemporary debate on idolatry and iconoclasm.⁶⁴² Maximus saw images as harmless aids for people who struggled to grasp the true nature of divinity, but denied the power of statues to act as equivalents to or vessels for the gods.⁶⁴³ As we saw in chapter 1, religion is an important issue in the question of whether ancient statues count as art in the modern sense - whether they were primarily images or embodiments of the gods. Both roles are attested in Greek culture, but Maximus' denial of one of them presents the objects as works of art, not focal points of religious worship.⁶⁴⁴ This favours the aspect of religious images that is most at home in a museum context. It allows the exhibition to engage with ancient religion (which was a research interest for both Seltman and Chittenden) without interrupting the organiser's focus on the secular values of ancient Greece.⁶⁴⁵ Indeed Maximus' focus on the human form means that these statues can be viewed as much in human as in divine terms.

The introduction to the sculpture section also contains an aside from Lucian:

⁶⁴² A.A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 124-7.

⁶⁴³ Max. Tyr. Or. 2.9-10.

⁶⁴⁴ Deborah Tarn Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 3-78.

⁶⁴⁵ For organisers' interest in religion, see: Jacqueline Chittenden, "Diaktoros Argeiphontes," *American Journal of Archaeology* 52, 1 (1948): 24-33; Charles Seltman, *The Twelve Olympians* (London: Pan Books, 1952). On the exhibition's support for secular values: Chittenden and Seltman *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue*, 11.

One little head (no 240) seems to have what Lucian called 'Aphrodite's melting eyes with their radiant glance...and Sosandra's grave half-smile'.



Figure 21. The smiling head of Aphrodite in the 1946 exhibition at the Royal Academy⁶⁴⁶

This passing reference seems to be a straightforward (if somewhat obscure) descriptive reference. It obliquely compares the head to a named (but not extant) statue: the Aphrodite Sosandra by Kallias. The name derives from this passage of Lucian, but may also be the statue by the same artist seen by Pausanias on the Acropolis.⁶⁴⁷ The quotation offers a learned-sounding way of comparing the head to a known statue type while sidestepping the difficulties

⁶⁴⁶ Chittenden and Seltman, *Greek Art: A Commemorative Catalogue*, 37, Plate 52.

⁶⁴⁷ *Imagines*, 6; Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents*, 47.

of firm identification. It would have been impossible for Seltman to make such an identification: little is known about this statue apart from this mention and Lucian specifically states that the statue's head is covered, which this head is not. While looking for the originals on which statues were based was a well-established academic pursuit, Seltman condemned the practice as a dead end and must have had other reasons to include this particular reference.⁶⁴⁸

The phrase quoted comes from *Essays in Portraiture*, a dialogue in which two men create a composite portrait of the same woman: one in sculpture, the other in words. In using this quotation, the guide compares a statue to a woman being compared to a statue. This highlights the ambiguities between human and divine in Greek sculpture, something particularly marked in images of women because both women and goddesses present the same idealised features.⁶⁴⁹ As in the Maximus quotation, this gently highlights the humanity of ancient representations of the gods, and confirms Seltman's humanistic readings of Greek culture. This is also a text that reflects a relationship between literature and art that is both collaborative and competitive. While the two men work in parallel, Lucian keeps visual art in its place by stating that it cannot represent the soul and, of course, we only see the visual portrait through Lucian's description.⁶⁵⁰

Seltman was well aware of Lucian's mixed feelings about visual art. He used an extensive quotation from *The Dreamer or Lucian's Career* in his *Approach to Greek Art*.⁶⁵¹ This describes a dream in which Lucian must choose his career between two female personifications of Statuary and Culture. Culture wins out and

⁶⁴⁸ Charles Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 84.

⁶⁴⁹ Sheila Dillon, *The Female Portrait Statue in the Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶⁵⁰ Tarn Steiner, *Images in mind*, 295-306.

⁶⁵¹ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 102-3.

sculptors are described as ill-appreciated, low paid labourers. Seltman used this to argue that sculpture has been overvalued in the reception of Greek art. This is a conclusion that is easily confirmed with reference to other ancient sources, but Seltman was unwilling to completely devalue the status of all art. Instead he posited a high-status category of art which he termed *celature*, encompassing “carving, chasing and engraving on gold, silver, bronze, ivory and gems.”⁶⁵² It would be easy to see this as an attempt to raise the relative status of his own specialism (Seltman was a numismatist) but it also allowed him to reconcile ancient accounts of the low status of art (including Lucian’s) with a desire to believe that high art in the modern sense existed in the ancient world. It also reflects the skew in museum collections towards architectural sculpture and painted vases, two categories of material that do not seem to have been as highly valued in the ancient world as they are today.⁶⁵³

The exhibition reflected these values by including large numbers of coins (ancient and modern) but they were not so prominently positioned as the sculpture. The relative size of the two types of material must account for a lot of this difference - coins simply could not be as visually arresting over long distances. Similarly, visitor expectations of Greek art would have been largely dominated by sculpture. While Seltman challenged ideas about sculpture’s historical status, he was well aware of the place it occupied in the modern imagination.⁶⁵⁴ The exhibition clearly does try to call attention to the beauty of coins, and their guide entry is full of glowing, aesthetic praise. There is very little attention to their context and no mention of practical use beyond wonder at the beauty of such everyday objects.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵² Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 13.

⁶⁵³ Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture*, 99; Vickers, “Value and Simplicity.”

⁶⁵⁴ Seltman *Approach to Greek Art*, 11-12.

⁶⁵⁵ *Exhibition of Greek Art 3000B.C.-A.D.1938*, 25.

The sculpture section of the guide contained all of the quotations from ancient texts (apart from the introductory excerpt of Pindar). As well as those discussed above, there is a brief reference to the relevant section of Plutarch for a statue of Alexander Helios. The same statue also got a playful but condemnatory quotation from a cautionary tale by Belloc (“Alas! That such Affected Tricks / Should flourish in a Child of Six”) to stress the ridiculousness of a young child wielding power.⁶⁵⁶ The effect is idiosyncratic to say the least, ranging from learned to joking in a very small space. These are not particularly well known texts and on the surface none of the quotations seems to undermine the sculpture. They are more likely to be read as celebrations of the skill of Greek artists. But the very act of encouraging understanding through literature in an exhibition with a heavily aesthetic slant implied that these were not first rate works of art.

All texts selected seem to be at best ambivalent, at worst actively against statuary. Pindar was in active competition with sculptors and positioned his poetry in relation to their work as a better vehicle for praise. Lucian described his own choice between poetry and sculpture in one of his works and actively problematised the act of comparing a mortal with a goddess in stone in the passage quoted. Maximus described statues as something only needed because of mortal deficiency. The ambivalence about art in each of these quotations never quite comes to the surface and each serves its own purpose in interpreting the museum display, often helping ancient art seem more familiar and modern. But as a group, they show Seltman grappling with the relationship between image and text through several ancient manifestations of this trope.

The fascination with the relationship between art and literature and the desire to read one in terms of the other is clear in *Approach to Greek Art*, which Seltman published in 1948. It appears to have been based on ideas developed through

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

the production of the exhibitions between 1942 and 1946 and refined later.⁶⁵⁷ The book describes Greek art as divisible into two categories: poetry and prose. This drew on the theories of the philosopher Samuel Alexander which identified those two categories in all arts and was much more than an analogy. Alexander saw poetry (in his broader sense) as being about creating a vivid reality, prose about depicting and analysing.⁶⁵⁸ Seltman's history seems more a response to Alexander than straightforward adoption of his ideas. Alexander's brief account of ancient art concentrated on high classical and later sculpture⁶⁵⁹ and even in those statues they both discuss, they do not always agree: for example, the Hermes of Praxiteles is poetry for Alexander and rhetorical prose for Seltman.⁶⁶⁰ The idea that prose art is realistic and poetry stylised also seems to have been an innovation of Seltman's. This may be an attempt to come to terms with the broadening of what was deemed "classical" art in the early twentieth century and a response to concurrent interest in abstraction by contemporary artists. Certainly, Seltman was much more comfortable writing about art (ancient and modern) than Alexander and this leads to a clearer definition of the stylistic differences between visual poetry and prose.⁶⁶¹

Seltman fleshed Alexander's ideas out into a complete history of ancient Greek art. This begins with the stylised art of prehistory, arguing that it is not more childish in comparison to classical art any more than Homer is childish in comparison with Aeschylus.⁶⁶² Seltman believed that the poetic tradition in art

⁶⁵⁷ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 31-32.

⁶⁵⁸ Samuel Alexander, *Beauty and Other Forms of Value* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 84-136.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 113-116.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 113-116. Charles Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 78.

⁶⁶¹ Seltman, "The Greek Tradition in Modern Art," in *The Glory that is Greece* ed. Hilda Hughes (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1944), 151-155; Alexander, *Beauty and Other Forms of Value*, 103.

⁶⁶² Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 31.

continued for centuries: He described korai as the equivalent to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*; a Spartan bronze figure to the epigram on the monument to Thermopylae; the temple sculpture at Olympia to Aeschylus.⁶⁶³ Prose makes its first appearance in this history with the sculptures of the Parthenon (which he compared to Thucydides' descriptive realism), but eventually becomes rhetorical and deceptive with Praxiteles.⁶⁶⁴ While Seltman thought of the two forms as able to exist alongside each other, this pairing of literary and visual equivalents gives the impression that there is something about a particular moment in time that will be reflected in the character of its great works of art, both literary and visual. In the light of Seltman's literary categories for ancient art, quoted texts in the museum guide provide not only background information but also direct comparators. In this sense, Pindar makes a strong introduction to the exhibition, since his poetry very much fits into the mythic, stylised mould. But the expression "like unto beings that lived and moved" hinted at a growing sense of realism, standing for the prose art that was yet to come. Indeed, since Seltman saw victory statues as a major catalyst for the birth of realism in ancient Greece, so Pindar represented an important turning point between the two forms.⁶⁶⁵

The refusal to see non-realistic art as deficient and the desire to link style to social context reflects wider trends in art history and archaeology, such as Riegl's embrace of a range of media and sociological view of art and the growing interest in cultural relativism in archaeology.⁶⁶⁶ While these aspects of

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 36, 41, 62-4.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 65, 78.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁶⁶ Jaś Elsner, "The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901," *Art History* 25, 3 (June 2002): 358-379; Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152.

Seltman's work were well received, his ideas about poetry and prose were less so:

The application of this metaphor from literature to particular works of visual art may occasionally be illuminating, but it remains a metaphor and a wholly un-suitable basis for a rigid classification.⁶⁶⁷

We have seen repeated attempts to compare art and literature as sources for understanding the ancient world throughout this history, often derived directly from the ancient trope of *ut pictura poesis*. Often these represent an attempt to link all aspects of ancient Greek culture. Seltman's approach was no exception to this, but he extended this conventional argument so that the underlying content of art and literature was seen as identical, despite differences in outward appearances. As a result, he described both as following the same divisions of genre and quality. This means a dramatic departure from the conventional association of art with form and literature with content. In the resulting history of Greek art, art and literature are not two different cultural forms that can only sometimes inform understanding of each other, but products of the same thought processes that can let us experience the culture that produced them in greater depth. Despite seeming like a strange line of argument, this took a long tradition to its logical conclusion. The strangeness of his conclusions is at least in part because they undermine many of our conventional expectations about literature and art and highlight some of the difficulties of assigning art an intrinsic meaning in a deeply logocentric system. While we may not be entirely satisfied with his arguments for the equivalence of literature and art, these theories show Seltman grappling with complex problems that continue to vex art theorists.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁷ Martin Robertson, "Review," *The Burlington Magazine* 91, 558 (1949), 265.

⁶⁶⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Seltman was an outsider whose work seems to have had much more popular than academic impact (figure 22). His work has been largely forgotten today but he seems to have reached a large audience of his contemporaries through exhibitions and his writing for popular publications. While his sweeping theories and popular style were not warmly received by the academic community, they gave his work the certainty and clarity that appealed to the Greek and British governments for these exhibitions. *Approach to Greek Art* shows a degree of self-awareness about this though its dedication to his collaborator Jacqueline Chittenden with an adapted quotation from Catullus 1:

CVI DONO LEPIDUM NOVVM LIBELLUM
IACLINE, TIBI: NAMQUE TV SOLEBAS
MEAS ESSE ALIQVID PVTARE NVGAS⁶⁶⁹

It is not clear whether Seltman wished to be modest or falsely modest by referring to his grand theory of Greek art as a little book (libellum) and a trifle (nugas). This dedication does celebrate Chittenden's role in encouraging Seltman's ideas during their collaboration on the series of exhibitions and the importance of these exhibitions for his thought. The final section of this chapter considers how these exhibitions did more than simply clarify Seltman's ideas about Greek art. It looks at the centrality of museums to Seltman's understanding about art and its political role. It explores what it means that he thought the relationship between art and society (perfectly embodied in the museum) to be an enduring feature of art, as much true in the ancient world as the present.

⁶⁶⁹ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 7.

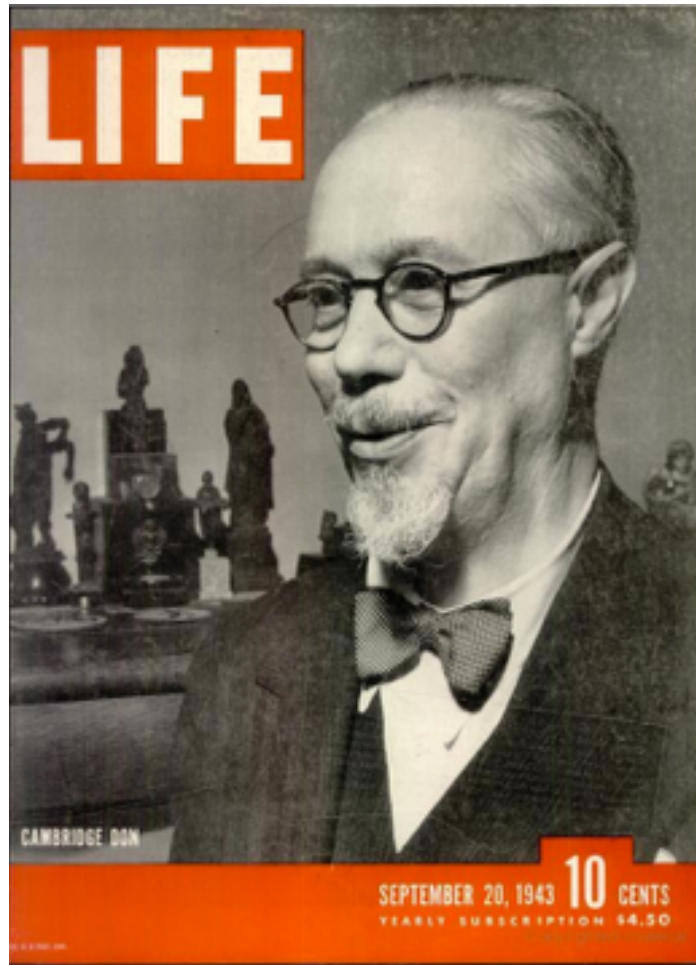


Figure 22: Charles Seltman and some of his antiquities represent Cambridge University on the cover of Life Magazine in 1943. “A don is the holder of a Fellowship at Cambridge or Oxford and the goateed gentleman appearing on the cover is Charles Theodore Seltman, a fellow in archaeology at Queens’ College, Cambridge. He lives in the same rooms occupied by the great Latinist, Erasmus in 1510.”⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ “Life’s Cover,” *Life*, September 20, 1943, 95-103.

The museum

We have seen how Seltman's theories of Greek art were manifested in his wartime exhibitions and how important these were to developing his *Approach to Greek Art*. Seltman's theories of art were devised in the processes of developing the exhibitions, and in these theories museums themselves were an important element in the history of art. The final chapter of *Approach to Greek Art* is titled "Museum" and sees Roman collecting as the culmination of the classical tradition in art. To Seltman, the museum was not only an important way of understanding ancient art in the present, but also a phenomenon that could be observed in the ancient world and that had a real impact on ancient art:

It is probably better to possess inferior statues and pictures than to possess none at all, for out of a society containing many misguided collectors, there will arise a few with taste and intelligence, and in a civilized polity something in the nature of a Museum will come into existence. Once you have anything like a museum then you have at least the rudiments of scientific method applied to the contemplation of fine art, for when the curator takes over, the dilettante departs.⁶⁷¹

For Seltman, Roman art was Greek art in a different context, and therefore Roman collecting was a fundamental way of responding to this tradition. He argued that, in a society with all the art of the previous centuries at its disposal, taste becomes an important way of coping with this abundance. Seltman described most Roman collectors as tasteless accumulators, but some individuals managed a deeper engagement with the arts:

⁶⁷¹ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 110.

Augustus was an art patron, Nero an unstable genius, the Flavians trustees, and Hadrian a scholarly curator.⁶⁷²

These parallels between the ancient world and the modern offer a playful way of understanding ancient patterns of collecting through familiar reference points. But this comparison also hints at Seltman's underlying ideas about the relationship between art and power and his belief that contemporary conditions echoed those in the Roman empire. Seltman saw the modern British, with their materialist (and now atom-based) physics and love of simple pleasures as "Neo-Epicureans."⁶⁷³ These perceived parallels extend to the art being produced and enjoyed: he compared contemporary art with its mixture of approaches to that of the first century B.C., with its perceived coexistence of "poetry" and "prose." He even went so far as to tentatively compare Western Europe with Greece, America with Rome and the USSR to the Parthian Empire.⁶⁷⁴ Seltman thought that artists were able to draw on a wide variety of past art styles to produce a rare artistic diversity. As a place for encountering and evaluating past art, museums were a defining feature of these conditions:

classification is an aid to the cultivation of taste. An unbiased museum mind can disentangle muddles, and it helps indirectly by isolating antiquarianism to promote freshness and originality in art. ⁶⁷⁵

This idea of looking back as a way of looking forward is an argument for the importance of the museum in both past and present. In this model, the museum ceases to be just a place for displaying art and becomes an important development in art history, signalling a new way of thinking about art. This is

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, 111.

⁶⁷³ Charles Seltman, "Art and Society," *The Studio* (1953): 113.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁷⁵ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 110.

an argument that many theorists of the museum would agree with, but what is striking about these theories is that the museum is not only something with a massive impact on the way art is made and appreciated, it is also an inevitable product of a “civilized polity.”

Even in the context of Seltman’s own ideas, this is surprising, since he was not a believer in an inexorable progress of art history. While his history does not depart very far from their narrative, Seltman takes care to argue against traditional ideas of progress and decay:

Greeks before the Hellenistic Age held no such views of continuous development in art, for such a notion is part of the concept of human Progress with a -capital P- foreign to earlier Greek thought. If you are descended from Piltdown Man or from the simple savage of Lucretius, you think you are on the upgrade and Progressing. Not so if you are of the seed of Herakles or Ion and you believe the Golden Age is behind you⁶⁷⁶

The unfortunate reference to a scientific hoax aside, this shows an awareness of different ways of thinking about time, derived from ancient literary sources.⁶⁷⁷ Conventional chronologies of progress are re-examined through ancient eyes and abandoned. This shows an interest in understanding ancient ideas in ancient terms although, as we have seen, Seltman was not above selective use of ancient sources to support his own ideas. The interest in reading art in its cultural context, rather than as part of an arc of progress and decline had been around since Riegl.⁶⁷⁸ But in this case it also leaves space for Seltman’s own ideas about the causes of artistic change.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁷⁷ Richard Fortey, *Dry Stone Room No. 1*, 98-104.

⁶⁷⁸ Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901.”

While Seltman did think that new art responds to old and becomes more self-aware, he saw societal conditions as the main influence on artistic change. This is only hinted at in *Approach to Greek Art* but an article published shortly afterwards makes his links between art and society more explicit.⁶⁷⁹ It gives a brief history of art from ancient Egypt to the “atomic age” - a term for his own time that reflects both the place of nuclear physics in the popular imagination at this time, and his ideas of contemporary “neo-epicureanism.” The main argument of this article is that art is directly linked to levels of freedom in society, with authoritarian societies favouring formalised “poetry” and freer, more individualistic ones favouring “prose,” especially realistic representations of the human body. Where before he had avoided judging the relative merits of the two styles, the links of “prose” with freedom and “poetry” with control have clear moral implications. In valuing realism over stylised depictions, Seltman also revealed a desire for depictions to have a direct relationship with reality - associating realism with honesty and displaying a discomfort with the rhetorical use of art that sits ill with his propagandist use of art during the war.⁶⁸⁰

Despite the emphasis on liberty, the point made by this article is more humanistic than political. The source of control stressed is the domination of priests and the persistence of tradition in religious societies. But Seltman acknowledged the mingling of secular and religious power in ancient societies and saw communism as a sort of modern religion and the major threat to contemporary humanism.⁶⁸¹ The important opposition for Seltman was not between faith and atheism, but between paternalistic control and individual liberty. His emphasis on art as a reflection of society, and particularly the power

⁶⁷⁹ Seltman, *Art and Society*.

⁶⁸⁰ Seltman, *Approach to Greek Art*, 27.

⁶⁸¹ Seltman, *Art and Society*, 98-99, 109.

dynamic between rulers and citizens, makes it something inherently national. He did not think of the nationalist themes of his exhibitions as a propagandist use of art, but a reflection of its fundamental nature. It was, of course, a view of the nature of art that was particularly well suited to an exhibition that aimed to celebrate Greece and condemn its enemies. This desire for museums to present the world as it really is, through clear, unambiguous facts (even when they are trying to shape that reality through our opinions) is an enduring one. We have seen it throughout this thesis when museums made use of ancient texts that are deemed too fantastical. People had become more comfortable with stylised art but fiction, myth and poetry had little place in museums.

To Seltman, the museum represented a meeting point between art and society, where a group of people may display and reflect on art from different societies and time periods. This was not just an opportunity to develop taste by reflecting on form, it allowed a deeper understanding of human nature. Such understanding could precipitate real change in both art and society:

Anything that will teach mankind to know more about man, rather than about the means at man's disposal, must promote happiness and humanism. To such an end as this all art...can most perfectly celebrate humanity.⁶⁸²

This thesis has shown that the idea of the museum as a location in which art could influence society, particularly towards an ancient ideal, is one with a long heritage. Seltman picks up on this idea and makes it suit his contemporary context. Whether that was the relationship between Greece and Britain demanded by the exhibitions of World War Two or the suspicion of communism and celebration of western individualism that characterises his *Art*

⁶⁸² *Ibid.* 114.

and Society, Seltman's vision of ancient art always had a strong contemporary relevance.

Today Seltman's ideas seem odd and anachronistic and his influence on classical scholarship has been minimal. However, they show up how easily the museum naturalises our models of understanding art and projects them back on the ancient world. The aspect of Seltman's work most familiar today is the bringing together of two governments in collaboration on a temporary exhibition. The war time exhibitions represent a phenomenon that became highly influential: the loan exhibition in collaboration with a foreign government as a mixture of diplomacy and public relations exercise has become an important feature of the way museums work today.⁶⁸³ But the ability of art to represent modern Greece and celebrate shared values depended for its effectiveness on Seltman's ideas about art and society. While theories of ancient art appear to concern themselves solely with the ancient evidence, they can be difficult to disentangle from the political use of museum exhibitions. This political impact is all the more potent when museums pick up on ancient narratives, thus seeming to honour the values of the culture on display, while claiming universality for those narratives by making them operate in the present. While the war is long over and museums today feel that propaganda is antithetical to their aims, the conclusion of this thesis looks at how ancient words in modern gallery spaces are more common than ever.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸³ For example: John Holden et al. *Cultural Diplomacy* (London: Demos, 2007).

⁶⁸⁴ On museums' opposition to propaganda, see for example Cameron "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum."

6. The writing on the wall. Where next for museum narratives?

A visitor to the Ashmolean Museum today, entering the Human Image gallery, encounters one of the most famous images of Augustus, framed by two sides of his textual legacy. On the left hand side of the statue, a physical description from Suetonius:

His eyebrows met.

His ears were of medium size.

His nose protruded above

And curled in below.



Figure 23: Painted cast of the Prima Porta Augustus in the Ashmolean's Human Image gallery. (Photo credit: Stuart Bryant / Foter.com / CC BY-NC-SA).

This draws attention to the statue as a representation of a person. It invites us to compare the description with the features we see in the sculpture and to consider whether the sculpture is an accurate representation of Augustus. The statue does not have the heavy eyebrows or protruding nose described by Suetonius which raises the question of why they might be different. The idea of wanting to present a more flattering image is easy to empathise with, but we know that the image a public figure presents always involves power and propaganda. These are picked up more clearly with a quotation from Virgil on the right of the statue:

This is the man so often foretold
Caesar Augustus' son, the deified Julius
and founder of a golden age in Latium.

Where Suetonius described the features of a man, this extols the image as a god. It raises the question of whether the image flatters in the same way, and what the role of portraits was in political legacy making. The two quotations draw out two sides of the scholarship on this portrait - the question of its likeness to its subject (and the enduring fascination with the realism of Roman portraiture) and the question of its role as a tool of power.⁶⁸⁵ The grouping also sets out the themes for the display of portraits (and other images of people) that this Augustus presides over: exploring tensions between realism and idealism, individuality and status. There is a sense that the ancients have been allowed to speak in their own words, but this is still framed within the modern narrative of the exhibition. As in the *Exhibition of Greek Art* discussed in chapter 5 (and in less direct ways throughout this thesis), ancient texts are juxtaposed with museum objects to make a point in the present, while implying authentically ancient roots for this idea.

⁶⁸⁵ Beard and Henderson, *Classical Art from Greece to Rome*, 205-238.

The paint on the cast reflects how the original might have looked when new, and so adds a degree of authenticity, but such painted statues have long contradicted audience expectations of the classical aesthetic.⁶⁸⁶ Like the gaudy polychromy of the cast, the quotations offer apparently authentic information about the place of the Prima Porta Augustus in ancient life, but it is an authenticity that unsettles modern expectations. Visitors are given two very different “sources” to read alongside the image. Each is authentically ancient without being authoritative and the gap between the two texts serves as a reminder of the difficulties in interpreting evidence about the past. The display enlists the audience in the process of interpretation and encourages them to look more closely at the plaster cast, rather than trusting in the explanatory power of text.

The Prima Porta cast and its quotations are the first thing visitors see on entering the “showcase space” of the introductory galleries in the redisplayed Ashmolean. As such it serves as an introduction to a wider approach that aims to open up scholarship for the general public and cross the boundaries between cultures and academic disciplines.⁶⁸⁷ Many of the wall texts include direct quotations relevant to their themes, most often from ancient texts or from the writings of archaeologists. These are often succinct ways of making the wall text’s point, offering a personal viewpoint and introducing key figures or themes. But direct quotations are also often used (as we have seen in the Augustus example) to debate or unsettle expectations. A display of plain black pottery contrasts an ancient statement that “silver is black” with Sir John Boardman’s contradictory statement that “silver is white.”⁶⁸⁸ This both

⁶⁸⁶ Mark Bradley, “The Importance of Colour on Ancient Marble Sculpture,” *Art History* (2009): 427–457.

⁶⁸⁷ Henry S. Kim, “Crossing Cultures: Redefining a University Museum,” 44–50.

⁶⁸⁸ John Boardman, “Silver Is White,” *Revue Archéologique* (1987): 279–295.

develops an argument that plain black wares imitated silver vessels (even though they do not look very silver to us) and makes us aware of the scope for great differences between ancient and modern ways of seeing. In other places, visitors are invited to make sense of Linear B and confronted with some nasty ancient ideas about gender (“If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be; if it is a girl, cast it out”) next to some harmless looking Greek pottery painted with scenes of young children.

Ancient texts have moved from handbooks to gallery walls and the Ashmolean is not the only example. Another cast of the Prima Porta Augustus stands in the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, next to a passage from the *Res Gestae* to illustrate Roman contact with the Germanic tribes that occupied what is now Denmark. The same museum also provides context for its Greek art collections with relevant excerpts from Plato’s dialogues and quotes Tacitus to explain bog bodies.



Figure 24: Cast of the Prima Porta Augustus in the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen. Text reads “My fleet sailed all the way east over the ocean from

the mouth of the Rhine to the land of the Cimbri, where no Roman had reached before that time, either by sea or land, and the Cimbri, Charydes, Semnones and the other Germanic peoples in that area asked through envoys for the friendship of myself and the Roman People.”

UK museum visitors can find similar glimpses of ancient life through quoted text in a number of different museums. The *London before London* gallery of the Museum of London quotes Ovid on ancient British grooming habits and the Roman Baths in Bath repeatedly illustrates its points about the social and religious functions of the site by quoting ancient texts.



Figure 25: The Roman Baths in Bath evoke the ancient atmosphere of the baths with the words of Seneca: “The picture is not complete without some quarrelsome fellow, a thief caught in the act, or the man who loves the sound

of his own voice in the bath - not to mention those who jump in with a tremendous splash”

There have also been a number of more literal attempts to incorporate ancient voices by playing recorded readings in the museum. For example, the British Museum’s *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* and *Babylon: Myth and Reality* - temporary exhibitions that not only embedded recorded readings of ancient texts, but also took a particular interest in the legacy of their larger narratives in relation to the objects they displayed.⁶⁸⁹

In practice all of these texts were chosen because of their narrative power - whether they tell of a journey where no Roman has gone before, or simply the noises that can be heard coming from the baths on a typical day. Often they also tap into larger narratives such as the problematic power of Roman emperors or the idea of encountering “barbarians.” Quotations on gallery walls directly acknowledge the role of ancient texts in understanding museum objects, but they are also rhetorically effective within the larger aims of the exhibition. Because the quoted words seem to come directly from ancient individuals they belie the fact that they have been translated, selected by curators and modified by the exhibition context. We have seen throughout this thesis how museums were willing to use ancient texts selectively to support their own aims, and have done so particularly effectively with the nationalist aims that museum theorists view with discomfort. The illusion of ancients speaking in the gallery makes it harder to see cultural differences between past and present, so feeding into the modern museum’s universalising tendency which is its strongest ideological tool.

In many respects, this trend of quotations is not surprising. As we have seen, museums have been drawing on ancient texts since their very beginnings and,

⁶⁸⁹ Peter Lewis, “Babylon: Myth and Reality, British Museum, London,” *Museums Journal* 109, 1 (2009): 48–9.

since museums today place greater emphasis than ever on interpretation, it is no wonder that they continue to use these sources. Direct quotations are also a perfect match for museum techniques that aim to include more different viewpoints, appeal to emotions as well as intellect and provide a more integrated sense of context.⁶⁹⁰ They can be a stimulus to the imagination (a sort of reconstruction in the mind's eye) or to critical thinking (as in the Ashmolean's contradictory pairs), depending on the texts chosen. Either way, they offer a more active form of engagement than traditional labels. At the same time, they tap into very traditional values: nobody ever got accused of dumbing-down for quoting Virgil.

Given the long history of museums making use of ancient texts and narratives to understand their collections, it is worth asking whether anything has changed in current displays, or whether they are simply presenting the same old image-text hierarchies with a veneer of the new museology. There are few clearer demonstrations of traditional ideas about image and text than museum labels and their objects. The use of labels establishes a relationship between object and text in which objects are supposed to be the focus of attention, but their meaning is (at least partially) ascribed to them in writing. This fits with a wider tradition of comparing image and text in which these forms of representation are regarded as similar enough to compete for superiority, but operating in different ways. In this discourse, images are often seen as more natural representations, bearing a closer relationship to the thing they signify, while texts are seen as more cultural, with a greater scope for abstract content. In practice, while readings of images cannot be disentangled from culture, images do seem to work cross-culturally in ways that language cannot.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹⁰ Black, *The Engaging Museum*, 179-210; Falk and Dierking *The Museum Experience*, 138-141.

⁶⁹¹ M. Jay, "Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, 3 (December 1, 2002): 267-278.

There is strong evidence that museum objects do not speak for themselves, and that those who understand museum objects without supporting information do so because of educational and cultural privileges.⁶⁹² For outsiders this can make their interpretations and, by extension, the works of art, seem foolish, but it also raises the question of what and how an image communicates. Mitchell builds on this to argue that the relationship between image and text embodied in museum labels shows that the two are deeply mutually implicated (after all, a label without an object would be just as incomplete) and that the relationship between textual tradition and the artwork is something that is constantly renegotiated.⁶⁹³

Because of this process of renegotiation, museums have long been a site for debate about the relationship between image and text. This debate appears particularly strong when people discuss Greek and Roman art in museums, perhaps because of the long term cultural dominance of classical texts. It also seems particularly relevant to ancient art since the trope of comparing art and literature can be traced back to ancient texts, and often goes by the description from Horace: *ut pictura poesis*.⁶⁹⁴ In chapter 5 we saw one example of a museum exhibition which struggled with the relative status of art and literature in the ancient world in order to lay claim to their totality, and how such analogies could underpin grand theories of art and culture. Museums that want to lay claim to these ancient debates have to be prepared to discover that our assumptions about art and text are culturally situated and (despite being partially derived from them) are not the same as those we find in classical texts.

While our culture places heavy emphasis on text as a vehicle for truth and abstract reasoning, museums have a lot to gain from raising the value and

⁶⁹² Bourdieu and Darbel, *The Love of Art*, 108-113.

⁶⁹³ Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 40-43.

⁶⁹⁴ Barkan. *Unearthing the Past*, 65.

cultural power of objects, and have been a rallying point for others interested in challenging the hegemony of textual histories. Histories of archaeology often tell a story of the discipline's increasing independence from ancient texts.⁶⁹⁵ Professionalisation certainly did change museums and chapter four shows how alien the private collecting practices of the early nineteenth century were to professional curators a century later. But it also shows how older narratives still crept in, even when museum professionals believed that they could determine most of the things deemed important about an object (date, maker, place of origin etc.) just by looking closely at it. Despite much having changed, the rhetoric of the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles (chapter 2) and the message of the exhibitions of Greek art during World War Two (chapter 5) look remarkably similar, and the few differences are more to do with political context than any archaeological innovation.

In spite of archaeology's determination to distinguish itself from textual approaches to the past, texts continued to creep into the museum. It would be easy to depict such use of ancient texts as aberrations, but this thesis has shown that these exceptions are often driven by people who otherwise play important roles in the history of archaeology and museums, including such figures as Charles Newton, Jane Harrison, Heinrich Schliemann, Arthur Evans and the group who collected the Aegina and Bassae sculptures. The same Arthur Evans who modernised the Ashmolean into a "home of archaeology" seems to have enjoyed telling mythic stories about his discoveries. Perhaps the two are not as distant as often supposed.

Narrative is a perfect focus for getting to the heart of this contradiction. It is a form which crosses the boundaries between image and text, but takes on very different forms in each. Even where objects tell stories in their own right (as with the Greek vases in chapter 3) museums still needed to draw on the textual

⁶⁹⁵ Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 72.

tradition to make sense of them. In this way, narrative has forced museums to acknowledge the inextricable links between their collections and the textual tradition. But narrative also plays a much deeper role in the rhetoric of museum archaeology. Museums cannot form their story of the past based solely on the objects themselves, especially when looking for grand narratives that explain not only ancient art, but also the society that produced it and, more often than not, the modern society that responds to it. Ideas that can be traced back to ancient authors seem to carry greater authority but narrative is a potent tool for expressing ideas about the past and can persist even where museums are ambivalent or hostile towards text.

It certainly seems that museums have never been good at doing “pure” archaeology, even when most enamoured of this idea. One reason for this is that museums not only organise knowledge, but also aim to communicate it to non-experts. This was the case when Charles Newton used narrative commonalities between Greek vases and the Parthenon to convince a select committee that the British Museum’s Greek collections should remain together. And when Jane Harrison used the prestige and pleasure of Homer to get a broad public interested in Greek art (chapter 3). Historical novels have been seen as a way of mediating between intellectual argument and popular culture and this thesis has shown that the imaginative content of museums was being used in similar ways.⁶⁹⁶

Ancient narratives were rarely used purely as a form of evidence, and archaeologists’ desire to tell stories when engaging with the public seems to respond to a public appetite for stories about the past that tackle big themes.⁶⁹⁷ In practice, this use of stories could be patronising. While museums were happy

⁶⁹⁶ Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, 157.

⁶⁹⁷ Cornelius Holtorf, “Meta-stories of Archaeology” *World Archaeology* 42, 3 (September 2010): 381–393.

to use narrative in some limited contexts, it was often relegated to more ephemeral aspects of museums such as public lectures or temporary exhibitions. This reflects a degree of suspicion towards narrative. We have seen how Jane Harrison later disavowed the section of her career when she told stories in museums and Schliemann met as much mockery as interest when he claimed to have discovered Homer's Troy (chapter 3). But this thesis has also shown that specialists can be just as prone as non-specialists to searching for the truth behind ancient myths or telling stories about Greece as the birthplace of western civilisation.

This ambivalence reflects the desire to find deeper meaning in archaeology that runs against the grain of its desire for empiricism. While the nineteenth-century museum was keen to prove its worth against the more established discipline of textual history, both shared the desire to ground themselves in empirical truths. Nineteenth-century historians saw their work as an exercise in establishing truth, while getting at deeper reasons that underpin the facts of what happened when. This resulted in limitations of form and a suspicion of rhetoric.⁶⁹⁸ Narrating historical events turns them from discrete data to an integrated story with a beginning and end, causality and explanation. As a result, a mistrust of narrativity became a way to deny the construction involved in a work of history. This sort of suspicion of the rhetorical impact of narrative is still present in museums - especially in critiques of grand narratives.

Similar pressures towards neutral "truthfulness" caused dramatic shifts in the way archaeologists reported their findings in the twentieth century, with a move away from narrative, towards dry description.⁶⁹⁹ The problem is that

⁶⁹⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: John's Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1-42.

⁶⁹⁹ Ian Hodder, "Writing Archaeology: Site Reports in Context," *Antiquity* 63 (1989): 268-74.

description (while it can certainly be dry) is no more neutral than narrative.⁷⁰⁰ The awareness of this that came with post-processual archaeology has led to a re-examination of the ways that archaeology is reported and presented. Hodder has explored how both earlier narrative approaches, and later descriptive ones are bound up with prevailing power structures, reflecting a move from private, individual prestige to an institutional, public approach.⁷⁰¹ A widespread dissatisfaction with the readability and usefulness of the resulting reports, along with a theoretical mistrust of their pretence of neutrality, has led to a shift back to narrative.⁷⁰²

The critiques of traditional approaches made by museology mean that there is no longer a single approach to museum displays that is seen as natural and logical, so we need to think about whether there are some ways of displaying museum material that fit better with the evidence we have and the needs of the public. As White frames this question (speaking of history):

how are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another?⁷⁰³

This sort of re-evaluation is now common in museums, and many have come to the conclusion that narrative interpretation is the best way to get the facts across (as we saw in chapter 1). We have seen throughout this thesis that the use of narrative to make sense of museum collections and capture the public imagination is hardly new, and that it can carry just as much ideological baggage as any other approach. The rhetorical power of narrative that has made

⁷⁰⁰ Donohue, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description*.

⁷⁰¹ Hodder, "Writing Archaeology."

⁷⁰² "From the Ground up. The Publication of Archaeological Projects: a User Needs Survey." Accessed October 17, 2012. <http://www.archaeologyuk.org/publications/puns/>.

⁷⁰³ Hayden White, "The Fictions of Factual Representation." In *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (London: John's Hopkins University Press, 1978), 134.

it seem to fit ill with the empirical aims of archaeology in the past and which makes it ideologically suspect in the present will not go away. It is the same rhetorical power which makes it such an effective way of communicating archaeology and made it a recurring approach in museums. There are no easy answers, but thinking hard about how such narratives have functioned can improve museums. In this sense, the trend towards openness and questioning is a good thing. The Ashmolean offers such an approach, using ancient words that are surprising, outrageous or mutually contradictory to reveal a past as complex as the present. But even using the ancients' own words and with all this complexity, museums must reconcile themselves to an incomplete and constructed view of the past. It would be arrogant to think that this is the first generation to tell ancient stories in museums. Looking at the past of this phenomenon can help us think deeper on the subject, and find our own voice for the ancients in the present.

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